

A POST MODERN MODEL FOR BUILDING BETTER MARRIAGE
RELATIONSHIPS AT EDEN SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST CHURCH

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ABSTRACT
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by

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The ministry project of helping leaders to build better marriage relationships took place at Eden French Seventh-Day Adventist Church, New Rochelle, New York. Repeated observations have led the writer to the conclusion that many of the married couples in the congregation are confronting difficulties in their marriage. The purpose of this model was to design an effective coaching strategy that will increase the well-being of marriages within the life of the congregation. A pre-test and post-test questionnaire was administered to the participants. Results of the test showed that participants experienced change in their relationships as a result of the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The researcher would like to thank God Almighty. This project was not without its pitfalls. It was a combination of hard work and sacrifice. During the preparation of this project, the researcher's youngest son has been hospitalized many times. He is very grateful to Eden SDA Church and the staff members for their prayers and visitation.

He will forever be indebted to his wife Orphise for her moral support. A very special thanks goes to his sons Jeff and Reggie. Last but not least, the researcher will be indebted to Dr. Sir Walter Mack and Dr. Harry White for their guidance. He would like to thank them for their strong support and encouragement.

ABBREVIATION

SDA.....Seventh-Day Adventist

INTRODUCTION

We live in a time when change is taking place which affects our worldview and the way we live. The western world is now in transition from the modern to an uncertain postmodern period. Our society is characterized by broken and alienated relationships. This challenge requires a church strategy in light of the fact that marriages are fracturing at an alarming rate. The time has come for the church to become an agent for change and outreach.

This project, *A Post Modern Model For Building Better Marriage Relationships At Eden French SDA Church*, is designed with the intent of providing a model for ministry that will enable married couples to become living extensions of God's self-giving love, to express genuine love, and to create an effective coaching strategy that will increase the well-being of marriages.

Chapter One defines the area of ministry the model seeks to address. It introduces the researcher by way of a spiritual autobiography. It identifies the contextual analysis and develops the tools for understanding what is going on in the ministry area. It explains why this area of ministry was chosen and what special insights emerge to carry on this ministry.

Chapter Two discloses pertinent works that have contributed to designing the project model by authors who have made valuable contributions in strengthening the researcher's argument that married couples can experience a deep and meaningful

relationship with their partners. This chapter demonstrates the writer's comprehension and appreciation of God's plan for marriage. It enables married couples to express genuine love at the most basic levels of relationships.

Chapter Three establishes a theoretical foundation that affirms that such a ministry has a vital role in the proclamation of the gospel and has given full support to the concept of marriage as a sacred gift from God to humanity. It analyzes critically a segment of a published body of knowledge and compares previous research studies.

Chapter Four describes the methodology and the design employed by the researcher at Eden SDA Church. It also discusses research methodologies, instrumentation, measurement, and intervention in order for the reader to have a clear understanding of the point of departure of the researcher when the project began.

Chapter Five provides the reader the final results of the data analysis and what happened during the actual implementation of the project. It explains the data collection methods used, the data analysis objectives and the outcomes. It also incorporated a discussion of the analysis of the data.

Chapter Six provides the researcher's reflections on the field experience. It draws conclusions from the study, suggestions of what should be tried differently during the implementation of the project. It also makes recommendations for current and future projects. It helps the reader get a better understanding of the model. It allows the researcher to express his ideas and insights learned from the project.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The writer's Christian pilgrimage finds him insinuated in the context of Eden French Seventh-Day Adventist Church, a faith community situated in the city of New Rochelle, New York. New Rochelle is located in Westchester County, in the south-east region of New York State. It is 16 miles from New York City. In 1857, New Rochelle, the village, was founded. Forty years later, in 1897, it had blossomed into an expansive city. According to the latest census bureau taken in 2000, the city is 13.2 square miles large. It is triangular in shape, stretching 10 miles from north to south, and 1.5 miles from east to west. The population of New Rochelle is 73,446. It is the second largest city in Westchester County, and the seventh-largest city in the state of New York.

The church is positioned conspicuously, like a lighthouse on a coast, a reminder to the community that Jesus is the lighthouse. Historical records indicate that Eden Church was founded in 1958. It was a good, warm, small church in its day. The building measures 80 x 70. It was humble and quaint, anything but fancy. But inside its walls, love abounded. As a result, its membership steadily grew.

The four age groups that frequent Eden Church are as follows; approximately forty percent of the congregation is comprised of young adults between the ages of twenty and forty, thirty percent is comprised of baby boomers over forty years of age, twenty percent is comprised of children of teens between the ages of one and nineteen.

The remaining ten percent of the congregation is comprised of individuals over sixty. A survey of the demographic groupings was performed according to the members' professions or occupations. The writer found that the congregation is comprised mostly of students, health professionals, educators, office employees, helpers, unemployed, etc.

The ethnic groups represented in the congregation are as follows: 95% Black, 3% Asian, and 2% Pacific Islander. There is concern that many youths and young adults are not getting involved in the work of the church. The writer spent countless hours encouraging youth to stay in church and to get more involved in church activities. There is concern that many of the married couples are confronting difficulties in their marriage and failed to experience a deep and meaningful relationship with their partners. The writer encourages the congregation to do more for one another and the community with the understanding that, when we pray, God will hear and answer our prayer.

In June 1999, the church fell on hard times. One of the problems the church faced was the frequent change in pastors. Fortunately for Eden church, the Lord sent them a sound pastor-wife team. During the couple's five years of leadership, the membership grew to 160 constituents. When asked the reason for the steady growth, the pastor stated that it was due to new programs that had been instated following his arrival. The members, infused with new hope and determination, pressed for a better, more spiritually secure future. The church began participating more in community service projects: the members launched a spiritual gift seminar, organized a new year's vision retreat, formed training programs that taught the parish how to minister to the needs of the community, and much more. The results were stunning, and still impacting the community today. It goes to show that the grace of God continues to work in the congregation.

Since the writer assumed leadership in 2004, the membership has grown to 240 which a 100% increase since its inception. The church experiences a vibrant worship service every week. The church has also lived socially.

To better understand the writer, it might be helpful to sketch his spiritual trajectory. His earthly pilgrimage has its genesis in the town of Cap-Haitian, on the French West Indian Island of Haiti. The writer is the eldest of five siblings born to Joachim and Anne Monestime. The writer's father was a teacher. His mother was a designer. They were loved by the people in their community. Both parents were practicing Christians of the Wesleyan faith. As a child, the writer was taken to Sunday school and afternoon church services. He grew up in a small town. His preschool years were crucial to his development as an individual. His parents took advantage of this yearning for knowledge, and instilled in him, righteous habits that would help him garner success in the future. At first the central people in his life were his parents. Both of his parents have impacted his spiritual formation. His father was a man of faith. Prayer was part of his daily existence. The writer learned from his father that the Christian life is prayer right through. His mother's view was rooted in scripture. By example she taught him the biblical precepts. The writer recalls receiving his first theological lesson from his beloved dad. He recognized prayer and the study of scripture as pathways ushering him into the realm of the Divine. Both practices were modeled to him by supportive parents.

In the writer's childhood, the education that he received from his parents was supplemented with a biblical education. He was taught about the heroes and heroines of the Bible. He also learned about those who diverted away from God's laws and principles, and what the spiritual consequence was for such biblical characters. Since an

early age, the writer developed the habit of approaching his parents, to share with them his thoughts, dreams, and aspirations. Because of this kind of communication, his parents were able to give him advice that helped him better think through problems and avoid many pitfalls that comes in this life.

The writer's parents established the right attitudes about learning for their children. They showed enthusiasm over homework and school accomplishments. They were concerned and interested in the writer's physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual growth. They participated in his learning by communicating with his teachers and fostering a relationship with them. They discussed his progress, or lack thereof, periodically with his professors. They listened to his teachers and took instructions about how to better help him excel in his academic endeavors. The writer's parents were actively concerned and their concern paid off handsomely. They instilled in the writer a love for books and thirst for knowledge. They created an atmosphere of dynamic interest about local, national and global affairs.

The writer's parents expressed to the writer, during his adolescence, what they thought were the correct standards of conduct. The writer's parents also understood that, when it came to instilling character and morals in their children, they must first do so by modeling as the old adage says, *actions speak louder than words*. The writer's parents taught him to respect adults and rules. This included his teachers, elders, the laws of the land, and the rights of other human beings. They instilled in the writer proper values that he would need to succeed in life. They explained thoroughly to him the consequences of right and wrong actions. They painted vivid pictures for him, using past experiences of their own lives, and examples from the Bible. He shall never forget the long talks they

had about the ill effects of smoking, drug use, watching too much television, listening to degrading music, having the wrong kinds of friends, work ethics, entertaining self-pity, and leading an irresponsible life. They explained to him how his actions, if wrong could impact him, his loved ones, and society in harmful ways.

It was the writer's parents who taught him that there were spiritual laws that governed their everyday lives, and that consequences lay in wait for those who broke these spiritual laws. They taught him to obey all of God's laws unflinchingly. They taught him that Bible study should be a part of every family's schedule. They backed all of their instructions with examples from the Bible. They taught him the Ten Commandments. They educated him regarding the application of these commandments in times of trouble and need. They explained to him, and he came to learn, that these commandments were, in fact, a summary on how to live, how to give, how to take to heart the concern of our neighbors and most importantly, how to honor God.

As the writer reflects on the trajectory of his life, the death of his father subjected him to a long distressing tunnel of tragedy. At that point in his life, the writer found great comfort in God's word. The scriptures instruct that its society's responsibility to take care of the fatherless, the widows and those in need of physical, psychological, and emotional assistance. The Bible states that "God holds responsible society to make sure that the needs of the deprived are met, whatever those needs" (Deuteronomy 14: 28, 29).¹ The apostle James, in writing to the twelve tribes of Israel in the New Testament, defined true religion in these terms: "To visit the fatherless and widows in affliction" (James 2: 27).²

¹Dt 14:28, 29.

²Jas 2:27.

During the tumultuous times, the writer's pastor was sensitive to his difficult situation. He captured the writer's mind. He assisted him in navigating a long tunnel of tribulation that literally rocked his world. God has wiped every tear from his eyes.

Two years after the death of his father, the family immigrated to the United States. As a family, they did their best to continue to press forward. It had been the writer's lifelong dream to eventually pursue university education in the United States of America, and God granted him the desire of his heart. After arriving in the United States of America, the writer enrolled in City College of the City University of New York where he completed a baccalaureate degree. Family has always been important to him. Two years after graduating from college, the writer met and married his high school sweetheart Orphise. They were excited about their marriage. This heavenly union spawned two loving sons, Jeffrey and Reginald.

When the writer got married, he and his wife felt they ought to attend church. They looked for churches in proximity to their home. They selected one that was convenient, respectable, and modern. It was a friendly group with a personable pastor. But, they made an error. Before picking the church, they did not stop to think about what the purpose of going to church was. They did it just because it was habit. They thought all people should attend church; and why not?

Many people do things out of habit without asking why. What did they truly believe? They had no deep-rooted convictions. They believed, of course, those things they had most often heard about church. And while attending, they believed most, if not all of the things they heard at church. They believed there was a heaven and hell. They believed that they should live an ethical life. From boyhood, the writer heard countless

pastors preach about *grace*, *sanctification*, *justification* and *sins*. He knew their teachings were based on biblical principle. But yet, he failed to grasp a true meaning of the biblical passages upon which all of the sermons were based. In those years, the writer was just being part of the crowd, just another member of the church. He viewed the Bible for what it was: *the Good Book*. But he did not try to comprehend it. Perhaps it was because he felt it was beyond his comprehension. Of course, he assumed the preacher understood the Bible. After all, that is why he could preach and instruct on it. All throughout his early life, he looked up to pastors, and revered them as though they were of a different breed. The pastor was a holy man, not tempted by sin or by the pleasures of this world, like other people. The writer should have looked for answers to his queries in the Bible. But, he did not. At least not enough to where God could enlighten him.

He knew the Bible was *the word of God*? But he failed to grasp that it was also God's message to humanity, God's instructions, God's explanations concerning God, and why God is who God is, and what God's plans were for the world, and how God thought people ought to live, and what made God happy, and how people could—by applying God's instructions—prosper in life, while enjoying God's blessings.

The writer took religion to mean that people ought to go to church and follow God's laws. People were not supposed to go to the theatre on the Sabbath (or any day for that matter); it was a sin to dance, smoke, swear, or drink at any time. This was how the writer interpreted God's laws. And he did not bother to question where his church affiliations lay.

James Kouzes and Barry Posner said: "Church membership often supplies a portion of one's social life, and many men attend to make valuable business contacts."³ The writer had heard that Adam was the first man, and that he sinned, and *fell* whatever that meant. So, the writer supposed people needed to *get saved* in order for them to be redeemed from this fall. The writer was taught that he had a *birthright membership* in the church, and therefore he thought he was already *saved*. And as a consequence, he did not give salvation much thought.

And what did the writer really make of God and of Christ and of the devil? Well, God was to be feared and revered, and if the writer obeyed God's commandments, he thought he could make things go away himself. But aside from this belief, the writer took the notion of God as the creator and provider of *all* things, for granted.

Christ, however, is also kind and loving. He is our Savior. But yet, back then, the idea of Christ being a part of the writer's everyday life was *far off*. The writer just took Christ for granted. He chose to concentrate on the material things, the things he could mold with his hands.

The writer did not like the fact that his religious convictions were somewhat wayward; so he decided to do something about it. He challenged himself to study the Bible thoroughly. He devoted a year to intensive research and study to try to find the true meaning behind the biblical scriptures the Pastors often referred to in church. He put the Bible to the test, and found solace in the fact that he was being instructed by God. The writer was no longer assuming or taking for granted what he had heard or what others accepted. Through careful study, the writer was able to discern the truth for himself. He

³James Kouzes and Barry Posner, eds., *Christian Reflections on Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2004), 32.

realized that he had been wrong about God's grace and mercy and love. And thereafter, he gave himself to God unconditionally.

The writer repented, and accepted the Christ of the Bible. He became his true source of belief and hope. The Bible interpreted itself in front of the writer's eyes. It meant what it said, and it said what it meant. And more than anything else; it made sense.

As a sinner, the writer realized that he was subject to the ultimate penalty that God had sentenced on all sinners: death. For breaking the Ten Commandments, the writer was now subject to what the Bible calls *the curse of the law*. The writer had no hope of eternal life. But there was Good News. Someone had already served this sentence for him. And his name was Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ died for us in the first century A.D., thus becoming the ultimate example of sacrifice. The writer accepted His sacrifice. He accepted the blood of Christ as atonement for his sins.

God wants, first, to see a change of attitude from hostility to submission in obedience. "Repent, and ...be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins..."(Acts 2: 38).⁴ Repentance is another key word few really understand. To repent means to change one's life. The writer repented. Instead of going his own way, he began to obey God's laws. As John the Baptist declared, "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3: 8).⁵ But the sinner not only has to repent, he must believe God. He must believe in Christ's message, and in Christ's second coming. To show that he believes, the sinner must be baptized. He must be immersed completely in water. This,

⁴Acts 2:38.

⁵Mt 3:8.

the writer knew would stand as physical proof of his inward faith and acceptance of Jesus Christ.

So, the writer dutifully received baptism. Upon baptism, he officially began to walk the path towards salvation. In accepting Jesus Christ as his Savior, he came under unmerited grace. His previous record of sins was forgiven; his past sins were totally covered by the blood of Christ's sacrifice, forgotten forever. Upon accepting God and God's Holy Spirit, the writer became an heir of the heavenly kingdom. He also became a begotten son of God.

The writer could not earn forgiveness. That comes from grace; the free, unmerited, pardon from God. Grace covered his past sins. The writer was purified by faith. But he understood that he was still subject to the ultimate penalty, in the event that he violated God's laws.

So now the writer's life seems to have a renewed purpose. After he converted and accepted Christ's sacrifice, his past sins were forgiven and he was no longer cut off from God. Receiving the Holy Spirit, his mind was rejuvenated and he began to become more like the Holy Spirit, imbued with the spirit of love, joy, patience, and peace of mind.

Yet, as a human being, the writer still struggled to overcome sin. Satan, the craftiest of all creations, lured him in various traps, causing him to sin at times. But, unlike before, when he fell into sin, he immediately repented and asked that Christ's sacrifice wash away his transgressions. In that way, he was constantly pressing to become more like God. He continued to grow in this way, understanding that God's grace and knowledge can be his as well, if he did not stray from the narrow path.

Today, as is the case every day, the writer is confronted by temptations that put his values and principles to the test. In such cases, he decides what is right by basing his decisions on the standards which God has proscribed for all in the Bible. God's laws, written in the Bible, were given to humanity to steer us in a righteous direction.

The Bible was not written to satisfy the want of humanity. All of us must be willing to give up our own views and beliefs to comply with God's word. Salomon wrote: "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Proverbs 30: 5, 6).⁶ The Bible is not a book of compromise. It is a book of instruction and commands, that, if followed, will grant the reader everlasting life.

Over the years, the writer had come to realize that, unless he live a life of love and caring and obedience, salvation will not be his, and he will be equivalent to a walking dead person. If he did not follow God's laws, he would have no claim to eternal life. The writer may think he has not broken any of the Ten Commandments, but he has. Everyone has. But he finds solace in what the apostle Paul said: "I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2: 20).⁷

As the writer grew by following God's laws, his hostile nature was gradually replaced by the mind of Christ. He found himself filled with divine love, concerned about fellow Christians, wanting the best for others, striving to serve, filled with humility.

⁶Prv 30:5, 6.

⁷Gal 2:20.

In *Confessions*, Augustine describes how God rescued him from his wayward life and false beliefs. Richard Peace recounted his spiritual journey. He later wrote: "A spiritual autobiography is the story of God's interaction in our lives. It chronicles our pilgrimage as we seek to follow God."⁸

In each period, in each event of the writer's life, he tried to follow God's instructions. This is not always easy. Suffice it to say that God uses all of the events and circumstances of the writer's life to shape him into the kind of person God wants him to be.

Calling is a concept normally associated with ministry. The writer believes that pastoral ministry is indeed a high calling. The biblical prophets went about their spiritual work, understanding that it was a direct call from God; their messages often began with the powerful phrase, "The word of the Lord came to me..."(Jeremiah 16: 1).⁹ Throughout church history, pastors, evangelists, and missionaries thought of their work not as just a job but as a special calling to accomplish a particular mission for God.

Ever since the writer was young, he became interested in social outreach and pastoral ministry. He decided to cultivate his vision. He chose to become a minister where he could lay out several key steps in the stages of developing a holistic ministerial vision. His years of experience as a church employee have led him to conclude that God also calls many to support the church ministry. God has placed that calling in his heart. The writer began his course of studies at Andrews University of Theological Seminary and three years later he graduated with a Master of Divinity degree.

⁸Richard Peace, *Spiritual Autobiography* (Colorado Springs, CO : Navpress, 1998),14.

⁹Jer 16:1.

The writer strongly believes that God's providence is the reason he is where he is today. He is now happily employed as a pastor, and he is in the process of fulfilling his calling from God. God used people and circumstances over nearly a decade to bring the writer to the realization that God's place for the writer was as a *church pastor*. Over the years many experiences have given the writer opportunities for Christian growth and occasions to benefit those he serves.

He remembers the time when he became aware of his calling. In that moment he realized at the core of his being that he needed to be where God wanted him to be. Yet at the same time, he knew he would have to rely on God entirely. If ever there was a job that drove the writer to his knees, being a pastor did just that. The writer quickly found that the decisions that had to be made and the enormity of the responsibilities was far greater than he could handle on his own. The biblical admonition, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord Almighty" (Zechariah 4: 6)¹⁰ became my steady companion. The reality that he affect lives by the decisions he makes is a responsibility in itself, one the writer dare not assume without prayer.

Times do come when difficult decisions must be made. A great deal of time must be taken to discuss the matter with the parties involved. Yet, we must understand that it is impossible for us to venture forward, spiritually, if we do not ask God for accompanying wisdom and judgment.

One ever present temptation is that of making decisions based on our individual, human experience or wisdom. The writer has found that it is extremely dangerous, and unwise, to act in such a manner. Not that we shouldn't recognize the talents God has

¹⁰Zec 4:6.

given us and use them, but an attempt to do so without a submissive spirit, and God's assistance, can only end in failure. The writer is reminded of the reason Lucifer was cast from heaven: because he succumbed to his own wisdom and judgment, thus failing to realize that God's law was (and still is) law, and that any action outside of God's laws will lead to the eventual downfall of the violator.

The writer had the privilege of joining the church in worship through preaching. While he is challenged with the task of preparing a sermon every week, it gives him the opportunity to dig deep into the word as he prepares the message for his members. This process enriches his spiritual experience and goes beyond a mere daily devotion.

The writer spends a large amount of time at meetings. But often he is called to be a part of a church-board meeting. He cannot tell you how many times he has had the opportunity to be the face, hands and feet of the church organization. Yet, he considers it a privilege to put a face to the organization. He will sometimes meet individuals who have been hurt by the church in the past. He can offer a listening ear and apologize to them for what happened. Some have been brought to tears because the church has never acknowledged their pain. With as much as a few words, the writer is able to dry their tears.

The writer had many opportunities to meet with different groups, such as young adults. It is somewhat inspirational to listen to their observations and share their perspectives, while encouraging them and providing them with the resources they need to progress in their spiritual walk with Christ.

For many months, the writer has been on a renewed journey, trying to figure out what God wants of him and of the church. That search has led him to the book of Acts.

The first few chapters recount the blossoming of the early church. He sees that there was an embracing of the gospel message to such an extent that the Holy Spirit fell powerfully on this group of early believers who were fearless in sharing the good news of Jesus with everyone they met. People accepted the message by the thousands.

What was it that allowed the Spirit to move in such a way? The writer has asked himself that question and has come to the conclusion that they were a people of the Great Commission. God calls the writer to share this good news of the gospel with others. Jesus commanded: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you"(Matthew 28: 19, 20).¹¹ As a believer, the writer must immerse himself so much in God's calling to share God's gospel with others that it becomes part of him, part of who he is and how he lives, part of his individual make-up as a child of Christ. The writer wants to share ideas with others. He wants to cast this vision before those whom he serves. He believes that part of his calling involves setting forth a spiritual vision, and bringing that vision to fruition by following succinctly in the footsteps of Christ. Only then will the Spirit be able to work in people's lives and help ready the world for Christ's second coming.

The writer loves the way the apostle Paul describes the body of Christ in Romans 12; it is an amazing concept. We are one body with many parts, each working together toward a common goal. Paul says, "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us" (Romans 12: 6).¹² He then lists prophesying, serving, teaching, encouraging, giving to

¹¹Mt 28:19, 20.

¹²Rom 12:6.

others, and more. The writer pays attention to the one called leadership. Paul says, "If you recognize your gift as leadership, then govern diligently"(Romans 12: 8).¹³

After working for the Lord for many years, the writer's calling became clear. His heart's desire is, and always was, to support God's cause until God comes. In telling his story, the writer wants to keep his focus on the role of God in his life. God has called the writer to *govern diligently*. He has called the writer to serve the church to the best of his ability. E. Stanley Jones said: "All great discoveries are a reduction from complexity to simplicity."

The writer believes that a pastor's calling is the highest and most honorable calling. His prayer is this: regardless of the calling God has placed in my heart, I pray that I will go about my duty (in doing his work) with a passion worthy of that calling. Paul said it well: "As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received" (Ephesians 4: 1).¹⁴

A few years ago, the Board of Trustees of Eden Seventh-Day Adventist Church organized a project committee to conduct a study with the intent to develop an effective ministry of reconciliation in the church. The findings of the study pointed to the necessity of such a ministry because many married couples in the congregation are in dire difficulties. During the writer's tenure, he began to examine the areas of family ministry. He convinced the Board of Trustees of the transformation that God wants for the married couples in the church who are confronted with difficulties in their marriage. He believes

¹³Rom 12:8.

¹⁴Eph 4:1.

that God has orchestrated the confluence of events in order that he might serve as an agent of change to that particular faith community.

Each person has a responsibility to train others and to envision what tomorrow can be. The writer concurs that the future of marriage life is at risk. Confronted with such a reality, he views himself as a vital link with the task of training and speaking to those married couples to whom he is called to minister. He focused on the inspiration that God desires to bring to a community that has undergone so many crises.

From his childhood up to the present time, the writer's entire spiritual trajectory has been a journey of preparation for this challenging assignment. His afflictions and troubles, though harrowing and upsetting, were ameliorated by trust and confidence in God. The writer trust God absolutely to deliver him. He has the vision. He knows his purpose in life. Hence, with God at the controls, he could succeed. He believes he can use the most important gifts and graces to share something interesting about each married couple. Family Ministry strengthens existing relationships and promotes understanding, reconciliation, and healing.

The purpose of *Family by Ministry Counseling and Ministry of Reconciliation* is to transform the believer so that he or she may share challenges facing family today with others in order to solve them. The writer believes if he can develop this ministry, the church can go to another dimension. A ministry to married couples needs to be broad and comprehensive in order to do an adequate job in this area. All married couples and all families need the support and intentional ministry of the church.

Post Modernism

The title of this project is *A Post-Modern Model for Building Better Marriage Relationships at Eden French Seventh-Day Adventist Church*. In this chapter the writer will define postmodernism and present the historical heritage of the development of post modernity. He will discuss the main characteristics and values of postmodernism.

The western world is now in transition. Robert F. Webber points out that “Transitions from one paradigm to another are complex and include the breakdown of the old and development of new ideas that eventually culminate in a new paradigm.”¹⁵ The term postmodern suggests that it is *post* or after the modern era. It can be translated as *beyond now*, living on the edge with the constant flow of changes. Stanley Grenz in his book, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, writes, “Postmodernism likewise entails a rejection of the emphasis of the emphasis on rational discovery through the scientific method, which provided the intellectual foundation for the modern attempt to construct a better world. At this foundation, then the postmodern outlook is anti-modern.” Postmodernism is accepted as part of reality and normality, a phenomenon in an emerging culture.”¹⁶

In his book, *Ancient-Future Faith*, Robert Webber explains postmodernism in its full complexity. He states, “Indications of a postmodern worldview suggest that mystery, with its emphasis on complexity, and community, with its emphasis on the interrelationship of things, and symbolic forms of communication, with on the visual, are all central to the new way of thinking.”¹⁷

¹⁵Robert F. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books), 34.

¹⁶Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 12.

¹⁷ Webber, 35.

The eighteenth century in European history is generally referred to as the Enlightenment period. Newton began from the assumption that God is a personal Creator. As a result, he consciously explored nature as a revelation of the divine artist. In the early seventeenth century, scripture remained as the nearly unchallenged source of authority.¹⁸ Rene Descartes (1596 – 1650), argued “that human consciousness is the ultimate arbiter of truth in his celebrated axiom, *cogito ergo sum*.”¹⁹ John Locke’s (1632 – 1704) unblemished *white paper mind* was a key concept of the giants of the empirical movement, which stressed the role that experience, and later experimentation, played in the accumulation of knowledge.²⁰ David Hume (1711- 1776) in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* asserted that “ A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”²¹ Steven Kreis pointed out: “In terms of religion, only some philosophers were atheists, most were deists and a handful clutched the security blanket of what the 18th century called ‘reasonable Christianity.’ Others professed skepticism, reluctant to accept either atheist dogma or Christian revelation.”²²

¹⁸Norman Hampson, *The Enlightenment: An Evaluation of its Assumptions, Attitudes and Values* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1990), 16.

¹⁹Rene Descartes & Thomas S. Hall, *Treaties of Man* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972).

²⁰John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1959).

²¹David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, L. A. Selby Biggs, ed. (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1902), 114.

²²Steven Kreis, “The Triumph of Science and the Heavenly City of the 18th Century Philosopher,” in the History Guide Lectures on Modern European Intellectual History, Lecture 9, 2002.

Modernism is the term generally applied to the period in western intellectual history beginning near the end of the nineteenth century. Some see it as applicable to the “wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature of the early twentieth century.”²³ To understand the effects of postmodernism upon our culture, the contrast with modernity needs to be drawn. As the contrast is understood, the awkward struggle the church is enduring may be clarified and thoughtful solutions may be available. Descartes laid the philosophical foundation for modernity with his focus on doubt.

Chuck Smith observes, “Whereas the pre-modern challenge was to reconcile facts to faith, the modern challenge was to reconcile faith to the facts. If there was any serious conflict, faith was the loser.”²⁴ As the term suggests, postmodernism represents a reaction to the failures of modernism. Although it did not receive general consideration until the 1970’s, its ideas were towards the end of the modernist era. The term was first applied to a style of architecture and then gradually began to infiltrate academic circles especially the disciplines of literature and philosophy.²⁵ “Postmodernism is an effort to move beyond the structure and restraints imposed by modernity. It is a rejection of the modernity mind-set.”

Steven Connor writes that, “Postmodernism is quite simply the ideology that rejects any notion of universally applicable truth. There is not one truth, but many small truths. The paramount virtue in postmodern ideology is tolerance.” He added, “What is

²³Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1991), S. V. “modernism.”

²⁴Chuck Smith Jr., *The End of the world... As we know it* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brooks Press, 2001), 18.

²⁵“Postmodernism” <http://www.public-domain-content.com/Architecture/PostModernism.shtml> (May 2005).

striking is precisely the degree of consensus in postmodernist discourse that there is no longer any possibility of consensus, the authoritative announcement of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable.”²⁶

Postmodernism is a reaction to the rationalistic of modernism. Postmodern people do not deny that there is truth and objective reality. What they question is the ability to distinguish truth from non-truth. Postmodernism has some characteristics:

1) Not one *Big Truth* but rather many *Small Truths*

Postmodernism says that they are in the sea of many truths. They are suspicious of large-scale explanation and universal moralities. Truth is what you find out yourself through your experience, but not what someone else imposes on you. We have not only become aware of a plurality of conflicting legitimating stories but have moved into the age of the demise of the narrative.²⁷

2) Not only One way but Diversity

One of the central hallmarks of postmodern ethos is the loss of centeredness which has led to a cultural expression known as pluralism, perhaps most evident in the cultural life of our society.²⁸ Today, the modern mosaic is the television screens, which consist of many small pixels. Each has its own color. In the right combination it creates images on the screen. Post Modernists are very much like the screen with so many different aspects and arrangements, perspectives and colors, shades and intermixing patterns, and which create new personal and social images.²⁹

²⁶Steven Connor, *Postmodernist Culture: An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1998), 24.

²⁷Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 45.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 20.

²⁹Craig Kennett Miller, *Post Moderns: The Beliefs, Hopes & Fears of Young Americans* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources, 1996), 125.

3) Not Religion but Spirituality

Postmodernists are not interested in organized religion but seek spirituality which sits on the top of their list of interests. For spirituality to be real, it must lead to a quest that encompasses all aspects of a person's life: thoughts, emotions, and the deep yearning for wholeness and healing that all persons have at their core.³⁰

4) Truth is not stated but experienced

In Postmodern culture, there is not interest in a second-hand God, a God that someone else defines for us. Each one of us is a Jacob become Israel: a wrestler with God. The encounter, the experience is the message.³¹ They want to see that truth is lived out before agreeing with a statement of that truth. Post Moderns don't want their information straight. They want it laced with experience, and the more extreme the better.³²

5) They cannot trust Institutional Authorities.

Postmodern people take cues not from those above them, but from others around them. There are no more bosses, only clients. In this radical democracy, vertical authorities like priests and professors have been replaced by peers throughout the world who share common interests.³³ "The answers to life questions cannot be found in the science laboratory."

6) Image Driven

For the Postmodern generation image means everything. The modern world was word-based. Its theologians tried to create an intellectual faith, placing reason and order at the heart of religion. Propositions are lost on postmodern ears, but metaphor they will hear, images they will see and understand.³⁴

³⁰Ibid., 166.

³¹Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims: First Century Passion for the 21 Century Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publisher, 2000), 43.

³²Ibid., 33.

³³Sweet, 53, 54.

³⁴Sweet, 86.

7) Participatory and Interactive

Postmodernists like to send their text, e-mail to the TV station, where their comments are taken into consideration. In the postmodern age, people pull in the information they wish to receive, and tailor it to their own needs. Postmodern media are made up of interactive media such as video games, personal computers, pagers, videos, cellular phones, e-mail, fax machines and the Internet.³⁵ The screen thus becomes an embodied form of our psychic worlds.³⁶

8) Question everything

Although postmodernism is at heart a spiritual movement, it is an outgrowth of the process known as deconstruction. The postmodernists like to question everything. Each proposition needs to be disassembled to be able to see little details passed over.

9) Objectivity is out, Subjectivity is in

According to Erickson, Postmodernism confuses the traditional distinction between the subject of knowledge and the object of knowledge. Humanity does not sit back and passively receive knowledge about the world; rather, interpretation is ultimately the way the world actually is, as it is revealed to a person or to a culture.³⁷ Post Moderns are suspicious of certainty and distrust the claim of objectivity. It is better simply to experience than to turn it into another theory or universalize it and proclaim it as truth.³⁸

10) They like Stories

Postmodernists changed the way they communicate. They like stories. McLaren states that "Christians need to remove as much religious jargon as possible and have the words. Simple and not place extra baggage, too high hurdles, stones in the shoes of the new world's spiritual travelers."³⁹

³⁵Miller, *Post Moderns*, 43, 44.

³⁶Grenz, 35.

³⁷Erickson, *PostModernising the Faith*, 87.

³⁸McLaren, *The church on the Other Side*, 164.

³⁹Ibid., 89.

Deconstructionism is the preferred method of postmodernism in dealing with ideas and constructs. For the Postmodernist, language is the encapsulator of reality. Gene Veith says “The implication is revealing, the standard of shock replaces the standard of beauty. The purpose is not to give the audience pleasure, but to assault them with a decentering experience.”⁴⁰

Indeed, to a postmodernist, “all reality is virtual reality.”⁴¹ Grenz says, “Postmodernism assumes various forms. It is embodied in certain attitudes and expressions that touch the day-to-day lives of a broad diversity of people in contemporary society. But postmodernism is above all an intellectual outlook.”⁴²

Douglas Groothuis, one of the Postmodern Apologetics, wrote, “Our souls reflect our worlds and our worlds reflect our soul. One who aspires to understand the nature of the soul ought, to be an auditor of culture.”⁴³

Francis Schaeffer, another Postmodern Apologetic, wrote, “History as history has always presented problems, but as the concept of the possibility of true truth has been lost, the erosion of the line between history and the fantasy the writer wishes to use as history for his own purposes is more and more successful as a tool of manipulation.”⁴⁴ Another postmodern apologetics Ron Mayers, wrote, “The individual who says he is a

⁴⁰Gene Veith, *The State of the Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 21.

⁴¹Gene Veith, “Postmodern Times: Facing a world of New Challenges and Opportunities.” *Modern Reformation*, September/October, 1995, 61.

⁴²Grenz, 38.

⁴³Douglas Groothuis, *The Soul in Cyberspace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 23.

⁴⁴Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the 20th century*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books), 70.

Christian, but does not live like a Christian, actually gives the lie to his own testimony.”⁴⁵

Rinus Baljeu explains that Postmodernism gives value to many different contexts—I am ok you are ok—with its assumption every point of view is a view from a point, it creates myriads of contexts. Every group of people forces you to find a common point.”⁴⁶

The watch word of postmodernism is holistic. Individuals must exercise integrity in the entirety of life. Post Moderns are redefining the social consciousness. They are kind to help other people. Postmodernists like to share information, resources, and being together to support each other. McLaren points out “In a fragmented and pluralistic society it is important to bring people together in a highly contextualized environment. Because of fear of disintegration post moderns are yearning for togetherness that inspires the oft-heard postmodern motifs of pluralism and tolerance.”⁴⁷

Post Modernists are known for their aesthetic sensibilities. Grenz points out “Many post modern artists conjoin diversity with the typically post modern technique of juxtaposition.”⁴⁸ Post Modernists are concerned about our planet and want to take care of nature, not to be abusive. Post Modernists value what their friends and peers think of them. Mark Mittleberg explains, “We live in a culture that increasingly distrusts spiritual

⁴⁵Ron Mayers, *Balanced Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1984), 58.

⁴⁶Rinus Baljeu, *Intersect* (Ithaca, NY: n. p., 1996), n. p. quoted in Brian D. Mc Laren, *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Post Modern Matrix* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 163.

⁴⁷Mc Laren, *The Church on the Other Side*, 164.

⁴⁸Grenz, 25.

authorities and religious institutions, but thankfully friends still listen to and trust friends.”⁴⁹

It is important that the church understands the time in which it finds itself. But in addition to opening the door once again to the Christian faith, post modernism, with its critical apparatus, has a few lessons for the church to learn. As Gibbs and Coffey point out, “It cannot take refuge either in castles of dogmatic assertions or in museums of fossilized ecclesiastical structure and liturgical antiquities. The church is also inspired by the hope of Christ’s return. Indeed, as an anticipatory sign of that event, it is learning to live God’s future now.”⁵⁰ Our project is framed in this context. This is the paradigm shift that the church must engage or find its self irrelevant.

⁴⁹Mark Mittleberg, *Building a Contagious Church: Revolutionizing the Way We View And Do Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 301.

⁵⁰Gibbs and Coffey, 216.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY PROJECT

God's divine plan for family relationships is clearly revealed in the Bible. After the creation, God gave a special blessing to Adam and Eve, sanctifying their unity and their life, saying: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air" (Genesis 1: 28).¹

The human family was extremely important to God. He blessed the first couple and gave them the solemn charge to increase in number and to take care of the earth. Since the inception of creation, the Bible identifies two institutions that God blessed: the Family and the Sabbath. Both are sacred, and both were created in order that man could obtain complete satisfaction with his partner (family) and with his Creator (Sabbath). Because God is the Creator of the family, God is concerned about its well-being, offering support, encouragement, and advice to those who are married.

God is willing to answer the prayers of those who ask advice in choosing a partner for life. In Genesis 24, Abraham sent his servant to find a bride for his son. According to the culture and custom of that time, the parents chose a bride for their son or a groom for their daughter. Abraham's servant did not begin his journey until he first sought wisdom and special guidance from God to assist him in this important mission.

¹Gn 1:28

The servant's prayer reveals his faith in God and his need of divine guidance. Clearly, Abraham's servant realized that his mission was an extraordinary one. Then he prayed: "O Lord, God of my master Abraham, gives me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham" (Genesis 24: 12).² The servant asked for a sign from God, and God gave him the answer he desired.

Abraham's servant recognized the importance of seeking God's guidance in the selection of a spouse. Abraham's son, Isaac, also recognized the importance of special spiritual preparation for his wedding: "He went out to the field one evening to meditate" (Genesis 24: 63).³ The Bible states that: "Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (Genesis 24: 67).⁴

It is recognized in family-life literature that marriages which begin well have a greater chance of succeeding than those that begin poorly. David R. Mace stresses the point that, "Marriage involves an extended and complex process of interpersonal adjustment."⁵ He also suggests that some of this adjustment can be made before the wedding day through proper marital preparation. While premarital preparation should include a broad spectrum of principles and attitudes, some parents feel unqualified to supply their children with information on sexual adjustment in marriage.

Randolph Ray wrote "If you train yourself for marriage as you do for a career, if you work at it as you do at your job, you will have an infinitely better chance of making a

²Gn 24:12

³Gn 24:63

⁴Gn 24:67

⁵David R. Mace, *Success in Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958), 23.

success of it.”⁶ In his book entitled, *Success in Marriage*, David R. Mace reports four points that two people looking toward marriage should do by themselves:

1. They should learn all they can about what marriage means.
2. They should get to know each other really well.
3. They should use the experience of courtship to grow in their relationship.
4. They should plan the future together.

He argues that, if we can choose for ourselves, between going into marriage prepared for it or unprepared for it, there can be any possible doubt about what we ought to choose?⁷

Love between the marriage partners is the most often emphasized theme in the literature on marriage. Loving is viewed by Erick Fromm as more of an art than a sentiment that can be easily indulged in by anyone. It results from maturation and the development of one’s total personality. Hence the truly loving person is a rarity because so few are really mature.⁸

For Spalding, love is the greatest power in the world. It is the greatest power in the home, where the problems of conduct are first encountered. No stern command, no weight of authority, can accomplish, in the formation of character and the direction of will, what love will accomplish.⁹

⁶Randolph Ray, *Marriage is A Serious Business* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1944), 21.

⁷David R. Mace, *Success in Marriage* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1958), 22-26.

⁸Erich Fromm, *Art of Loving* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishing, 1963).

⁹Spalding, 7.

David R. Mace agrees that couples of deep religious faith... see their love as partaking of, and reflecting back, the love of God. They see their union as ordained within the unfolding of divine purpose which embraces them and all mankind. Their happiness is deep and enduring precisely because they never make happiness their first objective. For one of life's strange but inexorable paradoxes is that the pursuit of happiness is a self-defeating activity.¹⁰ Now as of old, the true inner bond that sustains a marriage is love, not a superficial sentiment, but a deep sustained, outgoing concern for the loved one.

Another author, Fagal, agrees that in marriage each partner can seek out the best in the other, enlarging encouragingly on these good points, he or she will receive rewarding love and life-long appreciation in return. Expressions of confidence and faith always bring out the very best in another. Since love thrives on these positive virtues, use them lavishly.¹¹

In another place, Mace, a co-founder of the Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment stresses the importance of coping adequately with the pressures in the rapidly changing society during the early years of marriage to help build loving relationships by identifying six ways of preventing a marital crisis: (1) later marriage, which can be a time of bonding during the empty nest; (2) later parenthood, a time of sharing again for the couple; (3) help in early marital adjustment, which is invaluable; (4) *staggering* husband-wife vocational goals, this can be a time of growth and mutual vocational stimulation,

¹⁰Mace, *Success in Marriage*, 42.

¹¹William A. Fagal and Virginia Fagal, *Building A Happy Home* (New York, NY: Faith for Today), 11.

(5) family clusters, a time of sharing more than oneself and; (6) marriage and family enrichment which is always a plus to help couples with the blind spots.¹²

While the early years of marriage are very important on building love relationships, the importance of the middle and later years of a couple's life together must not be overlooked. Husband-wife teams emphasize this last point and suggest: the vast majority of married couples can, on their own achieve more satisfying relatedness, providing they are willing to pay the price of self-investment and mutual effort over an extended period.¹³ Marriage is the most difficult and the most demanding, but also the potentially rewarding of all human relationships, because it is potentially the most intimate. Because it is the most intimate, it also holds the greatest potential for conflict.¹⁴

Marriage is described by Erickson and Hogan as "the only well-known, long-term collaborative relationship."¹⁵ As such, marriage has four characteristics: "It is a voluntary; permanent; exclusive; and goal-oriented relationship."¹⁶ This intimate relationship of marriage is greatly influenced by certain factors called *dynamics*;" by Ernest Ligon and Leona Smith who look upon the husband as the cornerstone of the family.¹⁷ It is the wife, however, who creates the climate in the home which permits the

¹²David R. Mace, "Making Marriage Work," *Parent's Magazine & Better Homemaking*, October 1976, 18.

¹³Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. and Charlotte H. Clinebell, *The Intimate Marriage* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishing, 1970), 11.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁵Gerald D. Erickson and Terrance P. Hogan, eds., *Family Therapy, An Introduction to theory and Technique* (Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole Publishing Co., 1972), 7.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁷Ernest Mayfield Ligon and Leona Jones Smith, *The Marriage Climate: A Book of Home Dynamics* (St. Louis, MO: Bethany Press, 1963).

husband to develop the necessary skills to achieve that role well. It is the husband's influence that determines his wife's emotional outlook, be it temperamental or sparkling. By these examples, it can be seen that relationships are influenced by dynamics and spouses influence each other's dynamics.

Another author William H. Page, who agrees that the man is the head of the house, insists that to have a happy Christian home the husband must really get involved with his wife and children. He suggests that "one reason men have lost the respect of their families is because they have become spectators in the family situation."¹⁸ While Williams sees the husband as the initiator and aggressor in all areas of the marriage relationship and the wife as the responder, he believes "it takes the whole family working together to help each other to mature in love."¹⁹ Williams believes that the most important gifts a man give to his wife and children are his time, attention, appreciation, and understanding, not his money. The theme of his book is Ephesians 5: 28, "This is how husbands should treat their wives, loving them as part of themselves. For since a man and his wife are now one, a man is really doing himself a favor and loving himself when he loves his wife."²⁰

Most authors surveyed here agree with Tim La Haye that "A happy home doesn't just happen."²¹ But not too many authors agree with La Haye's concept of how a home

¹⁸H. Page Williams, *Do yourself a Favor: Love your Wife* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1973), 5.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰Eph 5:28.

²¹Tim La Haye, *How to be Happy Though Married* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Pub., 1976), 9.

can be happy. “It is the result of two things: proper adjustment to each other and incorporation into daily life of the principles of marriage outlined by God in the Bible.”²²

Another author who points the importance of love in marriage is Dennis Guernsey, who identifies three facts about mature love based on 1John 3:16-18. First, love is a giving of yourself irrespective of whether or not there are feelings attached. The second fact is that mature love seeks to practically and demonstrably meet the other person’s needs. Finally, a third aspect was that mature love relies not on good thoughts and works to demonstrate its reality. Instead it relies upon actions and sincere practice.²³

James Dobson indicates there is a great need for men to understand their wives if the homes of America are going to be truly happy. Too many men do not understand the emotional needs of their wives. Women have needs which men do not comprehend. It is this breakdown of understanding that has motivated his book, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*.²⁴ Married couples of Eden Church are not the first group of people to experience problems in family relationships. The biblical record is clear that the first human family had its share of problems. One example is that of a sibling murder when Cain killed his brother, Abel.

From then until now, all of human society has struggled with the problem of unsatisfactory human relationships, both inside and outside the family structure. Some people today are asking questions about the ability of the family to survive as an institution. An editor for a religious book publisher writes of his concern for family

²²Ibid.

²³Dennis Guernsey, *Thoroughly Married* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1976), 24-26.

²⁴James Dobson, *What Wives wish their Husbands knew about Woman* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1975), 13.

survival in an issue of the Fuller Theological Seminary Alumni Newspaper (Pasadena, California), which was devoted to *The Family in the Christian Community*. Is there a future for the family? Or will the family soon become an antiquated vestige of the past like horse-drawn carriages and ice boxes in the kitchen? An abundance of prophets of doom are running to and fro, predicting the end of the family as an institution.²⁵

In the same issue, a professor of pastoral theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, observes that “Today more than at any other time in human history, the nuclear family is under serious attack.”²⁶ As evidence for this statement he quotes a portion of David Cooper’s book, *The Death of the Family*, and describes the quotation as a “disturbing and vitriolic attack on the family.”²⁷

Newspapers and news magazine articles have often carried stories about experiments in marriage, and trial marriages as evidences that the modern family structure is undergoing serious societal change. “Can the families survive?” asks anthropologist Margaret Mead rhetorically. “Students in rebellion, unmarried couples living together call into question the very meaning and structure of the stable family unit as our society have known it.”²⁸ *News Weekly* devoted thirteen pages to a special section discussing the same issues. “A turbulent era of experimentation and change is under way in the American family. Marriage bonds are loosening under the strains of broad social

²⁵David A. Stoop, “Editorial,” *Theology, News and Notes* 20 (December 1974): 2.

²⁶George Ensworth, Jr., “Biblical Foundation for the Family,” *Theology, News and Notes*, 20 (December 1974): 3.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Time*, December 28, 1970, 34.

and economic shifts in the nation at large, among them the quest for equality in the home and fulfillment in outside careers.”²⁹

Dr. Paul Popenoe, founder of the American Institute of Family Relations, has sounded a warning about these trends. “No society has ever survived after its family life deteriorated.”³⁰ For those who believe in the sanctity and perpetuity of the marriage, it is encouraging to note that not all of what is being written today about marriage and family in America is negative.

David Stoop is one who sounds a positive note. “We hope this issue will help you raise your voice higher in the growing crescendo of the prophets of hope.”³¹ Bettelheim expresses hope that the family can adjust itself to a society in transition and still remaining a significantly strong institution. He suggests this can best be accomplished as family members learn how to cope with problem solving in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. He says that it is essential, therefore, when difficulties arise, that we refrain from blaming each other, we must instead accept problems as challenges to be met together, because it is only through trying to cope with these by our combined best efforts that we can regain the feeling that we truly belong to each other.³² One reason why so many married couples today believe their marriage is failing, according to Bettelheim, is their mistaken concept that good marriages never have any problems. The worst impediment to a satisfying family life today is the conviction that it should be free of

²⁹The American Family: Can it survive Today’s shocks? *U. S. News & World Report*, October 27, 1975, 30.

³⁰ *Time*, December 28, 1970, 34.

³¹ Stoop, 2.

³² Bruno Bettelheim, “Recreating Family Life: The Means are in our Hands,” *Parents’ Magazine & Better Home-Making*, October 1976, 72.

serious difficulties, and should run like a smoothly-working machine. If the correct view prevailed, that when people live together this, in itself, created problems, then it could be seen that the good family is not one in which problems do not occur, but one in which the members work together to solve problems as they happen.³³

The idea that only the non-Christian married couples in America are in trouble, if it has ever been true, is no longer true today. Christian and non-Christian married couples are both under great pressure from society to abandon their commitments to each other and let the family die like a sinking ship beneath the ocean waves of change.

For a Christian pastor to agree that such a sacred, God ordained institution as marriage is in trouble is hard enough, but to go a step beyond that and admit that the married couples in his own denomination are in trouble is even more difficult. And the difficulty of admission increases as the circle is drawn closer to him personally by focusing the attention upon his own local congregation, extended family, or nuclear family.

The pastor needs not see the disintegration of Christian families as a crisis to his faith, but rather as evidence of the priority the evil one places in his attack on marriage and the family. The apostle Peter says: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."³⁴ Since every person who is devoured by the devil is a member of someone's family, it is not difficult to see why the families of the church are affected also. However, the Christian pastor will

³³Ibid., 64.

³⁴1 Pt 5:8.

desire to contest this battleground with the enemy for the well being of his members and the glory of God who chartered the marriage and family institutions.

This writer's observations as a minister have convinced him that married couples in Eden church today are experiencing a divorce rate that is higher than ever before. In addition, he has come to realize that many families are experiencing growing unrest, unhappiness, and lack of fulfillment. These latter families may not experience a divorce, but they are certainly not happy. Some husbands and wives have stopped caring for or communicating with each other, if they ever really knew how to do either in the first place. We must face the reality of the situation that serious problems exist in Eden church and that no church is immune to the pervasive culture which surrounds it.

The real problem goes deeper than the problem of unhappy human relationships to its underlying causes which almost always have to do with problems in the sphere of divine-human relationships. That is, whenever two or more people are not getting along well with each other, there is a high probability that one or more of them is having some degree of difficulty in getting along with God.

The Christian couple has the responsibility to grow spiritually maturity. They must develop the practice of private devotions before the Lord. This daily experience motivates them to submit their body to the Holy Spirit. Calvin remarks: "The true growth of Christian couples is when they progress in knowledge and understanding and in love."³⁵ In his book, *Christian Counseling*, Dr. Gary Collins writes: "The spirituality maturing Christian shows a desire to be like Christ, accompanied by some evidence of the fruit of

³⁵John Calvin, *New Testament Commentaries: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 232.

the Spirit in his or her life”.³⁶ J. E. Adams poses the question, “Is it possible to have a Christ-centered home in today’s world of trouble and sin?”³⁷

When a couple wants to experience maturity in their marital relationship, they must realize that each must change and adapt to the other. We all have things to learn about relationships and most of us have habits that prevent our being happy with our partners”.³⁸ Creating harmony in marriage necessitates adaptation, flexibility, and the willingness to change. Adapting means to acclimatize, naturalize, and become accustomed to and familiar with”.³⁹

In order to build better marriage relationships, John L. Thomas, in his book, *Beginning your Marriage*, points out: “Communication and Communication. Communication brings new ideas and signs of caring and acceptance, and it carries away fears and anxieties. If dialogue is impaired, the relationship weakens and may die”.⁴⁰ Not only does communication facilitate the relationship in good times, it is also crucial in helping to mend a fractured marriage.

Bornstein and Bornstein report that as many as 90 percent of all distressed couples cite communication difficulties as a major problem in their relationships. Communication may not be the most important with a specific couple, but it is often the

³⁶Collins, *Christian Counseling*, 384.

³⁷Jay E. Adams, *Christian Living in the Home* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1972), 9.

³⁸Cecil Osborne, *The Art of Understanding your Mate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 65.

³⁹Rainey and Rainey, 234

⁴⁰John L. Thomas, *Beginning your Marriage* (Chicago, IL: ACTA Publications, 1987), 73.

most obvious symptom of a relationship gone sour”.⁴¹ If couples want their love to grow, they must communicate openly and honestly. They should try to understand each other. They should learn to manage their feelings in accordance with the fundamental values of respect, mutual understanding and tenderness in order to create more fulfilling marital lives. It is through communication that husbands, wives, and other family members interact. All communication involves persons transmitting symbols to which certain meanings are attached.⁴²

J. A. Fritze, a Lutheran minister and clinical counselor said: “You can’t know anyone unless you communicate with them. You cannot love anything you don’t know. Therefore, the depth of love existing between husband and wife will largely depend on the amount and depth of their communication”.⁴³

The basic, most important techniques that couples must possess to deal effectively with interpersonal problems are communication skills. Both partners must be willing and able to communicate. Regardless of how willing and skillful one’s partner might be, the communication quality is impaired unless the other partner somehow matches this willingness and skill”.⁴⁴

⁴¹Friensen and Friensen, 125.

⁴²Leo Buscaglia, *Loving Each Other: The Challenge of Human Relationships* (New York, NY: Random House, 1984, 53.

⁴³J. A. Fritze, quoted in Mayhall and Mayhall, 65.

⁴⁴Challon O’Hearn Roberts and William P. Roberts, *Partners in Intimacy: Living Christian Marriage Today* (New York, NY: Pantist Press, 1988), 33.

Both partners must desire deep, personal communication in their marriage. They have to make this a mutual priority.⁴⁵ Challon O'Hearn Roberts and William P. Roberts, in their book, *Partners in Intimacy: Living Christian Marriage Today*, declare: "If asked what is the most important thing a couple must do to work toward marital intimacy, the answer would have to be: Communicate! Communicate! Communicate".⁴⁶ David and Vera Mace in their book, *The Sacred Fire*, state: "An effectively functioning communication system is first and foremost in a marital love relationship".⁴⁷

In his book, *The Power of Ethical Persuasion*, Tom Rusk mentions barriers to human communication. He said: "All human communication reflects the push-and-pull tension between self-protection and openness. As husbands and wives, we often avoid saying what we really think and feel to avoid provoking one another".⁴⁸ "Education is a social activity. It involves communication among individuals with the aims of mutual understanding, meeting the needs of individuals and groups, and social change".⁴⁹

The intention of the researcher in designing the project is to help couples understand that husbands and wives can make mistakes. Therefore there is necessity to forgive each other and to recognize forgiveness as a gift. The sooner we forgive the better. However, we cannot for anybody including ourselves, to forgive offenders

⁴⁵Ibid., 34.

⁴⁶Roberts and Roberts, 30.

⁴⁷David Mace and Vera Mace, *The Sacred Fire: Christian Marriage Through The Years* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1987), 253.

⁴⁸Tom Rusk, *The Power of Ethical Persuasion* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993), 9.

⁴⁹Patricia Cranton, *Professional Development as transformative Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 19.

prematurely. “Before forgiving them, we need to sort out issues and work through our hearts and souls”.⁵⁰

Those who marry may not need to be freed from an idealization of each other and of marriage in order to become reliable companions and lovers. The dynamics of forgiveness maintain the momentum in marriage. The heartbeat of every marriage, as Christian sees it, is forgiveness.⁵¹ Rainey and Rainey in their book, *Building your Mate's Self Esteem*, state: “The act of forgiveness opens the door to healing”.⁵²

This is how Walter Wangerin describes forgiveness: “Forgiveness is giving love when there is no reason to love and guarantee that love will be returned. Forgiveness is repaying evil with kindness, doing all the things that love requires even when you do not feel the love, for you do love on the desert days when you don't feel loving”.⁵³ Beverly Flanigan in her book, *Forgiving the Unforgivable* discloses that “Forgiving has one overall objective to help you interpret the meaning of your injury and your beliefs about it”.⁵⁴

⁵⁰Andrew Sung Park, *From Hurt to Healing: A Theology of the Wounded* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2004), 89.

⁵¹Peter Chambers, *Made in Heaven* (London, UK: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1988), 122.

⁵²Dennis Rainey and Barbara Rainey, *Building your Mate's Self Esteem* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1966), 135.

⁵³Walter Wangerin, Jr., *As for Me and My House* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1987), 80, 81.

⁵⁴Beverly Flanigan, *Forgiving the Unforgivable: Overcoming the Bitter Legacy of Intimate Wounds* (New York, NY: Maxwell Publishing Company, 1992), 74.

Everyone needs forgiveness and everyone must extend forgiveness to others. Theologian William Barclay states: “There is no reckonable limit to forgiveness”.⁵⁵ Roberts C. Roberts, professor of Philosophy and Psychological Studies at Wheaton College, proposes forgiveness as a way of overcoming anger. He declares: “Anger degrades our lives in many ways. It messes up our marriages, destroys friendships, depletes our energy reserves and distracts us from getting on with the important things in life”.⁵⁶

The researcher’s comprehension of God’s plan for marriage is that love and intimacy cannot be separated. They may not be equated, but they certainly go together. Lucy and William Hume in their book, *Practicing Marriage*, point out that: “Practicing Marriage is a practice in intimate living. Intimacy, closeness with another, brings deep satisfaction to the human spirit”.⁵⁷ “In a healthy marriage, to be united means to share a common commitment, a common purpose, and common goals. Unity requires giving up some of me for the sake of the relationship”.⁵⁸

In his book, *Maximum Achievement*, Brian Tracy states: “Men and women are born incomplete, and need each other to become whole. They are born with complementary qualities and characteristics. Each needs the other to fulfill his or her human destiny. Happy relationships go hand in hand with peace of mind, long life,

⁵⁵William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew* (Toronto, ON: G. R. Welch Co., 1975) 2: 192.

⁵⁶Roberts C. Roberts, *Taking the Word to Heart: Self and Other in an Age of Therapies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 190.

⁵⁷Lucy Hulme and William Hulme, *Practicing Marriage* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987), 23.

⁵⁸Friedsen and Friedsen, *Counseling and Marriage*, 133.

health, happiness and abundance. Men and women with poor relationships, or no relationship at all, have more ill health and die younger than men and women who live happily together”.⁵⁹

The researcher admits that whatever causes that affect married couples, the solution lays in changing behavior. It takes benevolence and tenderness. It takes sacrificial love to effect change. It takes Christian growth and maturity. It takes concessions in order to make marital love work. It takes Christ in the home and in the heart to make it happen. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4: 13). God is a change agent. Listening in faith includes: “listening for the voice of God as I listen to another person”.⁶⁰

Let us keep in mind that building a healthy relationship is an ongoing process. You must approach the solution to your relationship problems as a continuum rather than a black-or-white, all-or-nothing, quick-change event. This implies the need for commitment, patience, and endurance. It also requires that we learn to evaluate relationship in relative terms. Relative to the way it was, is it getting better? Relative to the way it is now, how can it further improve?⁶¹

The success of the marital relationship depends, to a large extent, on the degree to which both partners are committed to making it happen. It takes mutual good will, comprehension, and tenderness for couples to resolve the unavailable difficulties of life.

⁵⁹Brian Tracy, *Maximum Achievement* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 286.

⁶⁰Emma J. Justes, *Hearing Beyond The Words: How To Become A Listening Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 98.

⁶¹Harriet B. Braiker, *Lethal Lovers And Poisonous People: How To Protect Your Health From Relationships That Make You Sick* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1992), 179.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Biblical Foundations

In the history of the biblical narrative God created people as individuals with unique character traits that make them who they are. God created them as social beings that enter into relationships with others. Marriage has been regarded as a sacrament and a social institution. It was divinely instituted by God as a permanent, monogamous union of a man and a woman. It was meant to be a blessing, another aspect of God's great work of creation.

The first of God's plans for marriage states that God created mankind, male and female, after God's image. "So God created man in God's own image, in the image of God, God created him, male and female God created them." (Genesis 1: 27)¹ We learned that we were created as distinct beings male and female, after God's image. There are some who consider procreation as the primary purpose of marriage. According to Jay E. Adam, marriage is much more than a license for a sexual relationship.² However, it is clear and very important to understand that God created mankind as sexual beings. God

¹Gn 1:27

²Jay E. Adam, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage in the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 5.

created us with sexual needs and desires which are to be expressed in harmony with God's divine will.

The second plan states that it is not good for man to be alone. The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." (Genesis 2:18)³ In this verse there are three important concepts for a proper understanding of what constitutes a happy and lasting marriage. First, God recognized that it is not good for man to be alone. The concept of companionship is conveyed in this clause. If it is not good for man to be alone, he not only needs a helper but also a companion, someone to be his closest friend. Malachi 2:14 speak of the wife being a companion, "You ask, "Why?" It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."⁴ Second, God said, "I will make him a helper suitable for him." A helper is one who supplements and complements the other. Third, man is to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."⁵ In this verse God gives us two more components for a successful marriage: (1) man is to leave his father and mother, and (2) he is to cleave to his wife. The first component of this third plan says that when a man marries, he is to leave his father and mother; his responsibility changes from being responsible to the parents to being responsible to the wife. To leave his father

³Gn 2:18.

⁴Mal 2:14.

⁵Wayne Mack, *How to Develop Deep Unity in the Marriage Relationship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1977), 2.

and mother means more than just moving out of the house. It means that he makes his relationship with his wife the primary relationship in his life.

One of the most important biblical dynamics for a happy and successful marriage is for a man to cleave to, or unite with, his wife. This uniting is spoken of as becoming *one flesh* or what is called *oneness*. This oneness includes sexual intimacy. God created us to experience the joy, closeness, and thrill of sexual love. However, oneness is much more than the sexual aspect. It is a total commitment and a total sharing of one's being with the other. As the couple share themselves intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually they become as one. This oneness that God intends is between man and wife and excludes a third person. This plan is so important that it is recorded four times in the scripture: Gn 2:24; Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7, 8; and Eph 5:31.

In addition to the three aspect of marriage, there is a fourth. God's plan states that marriage is to be permanent, not ending in divorce. "What God has joined together, let man not separate."⁶ It is clear from this verse that God's intention is that when husband and wife unite in marriage, the oneness bond is not to be broken by any act of man. Of the many attempts to offer some sort of explanation of how marriage began, we learned that men and women existed before there was marriage. The first natural union of human society is the husband and wife. God did not create even these as separate individuals and join them together as if they were alien to each other, but God created the one from the other.⁷

⁶Mt 19:6.

⁷David G. Hunter, *Marriage in the Early Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 102.

God gave a special blessing to Adam and Eve, sanctifying their unity and their life. In New Testament time, the Greco-Roman world, Marriage was something quite different from what it has come to be today. Although it was institution with serious legal implications, marriage itself was a private act that took place between free persons (slaves could not contract legal marriages until the third century C.E.). It was not necessary for a ceremony to be held, although ceremonies of betrothal and marriage were certainly performed.⁸

Marriage itself was a matter of intention: if two persons lived together intending to be husband and wife, legally they were regarded as married. Not even consummation of the marriage was required for its legal validity. The legitimacy of marriage was important to the Romans.⁹

Marriage in ancient cultures was as a rule, closely linked to the aim of producing children, and Romans were no exception. Procreation was regarded as a civic duty, and all citizens of marriageable age were expected to contribute.¹⁰

The world into which Christianity first emerged was profoundly ambivalent on the question of marriage. While the earliest Christians inherited from Judaism a rich tradition of reflection on marriage, other currents of thought, such as apocalypticism, tended to run counter to that tradition.¹¹

Early Christians, from the apostle Paul onward, looked back on these traditions about Jesus whenever they needed guidance on questions of marital morality. They found

⁸Ibid., 6.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., 7.

¹¹Ibid., 2.

two primary lessons in these traditions. The first lesson on indissolubility became a teaching that helped to define Christian identity in a world where marital stability was not always cherished. The second lesson on the original place of marriage in God's creative plan became a valuable resource for Christians confronted with a denial of the goodness of marriage.¹²

The Corinthian Christians are questioning the value and even the permissibility of marriage. However, Paul's general rule is that Christians should remain the state in which God first called them.¹³ Most of the later New Testament writings continue Paul's resistance to the demands of ascetic Christians for sexual renunciation. They also develop further his desire to preserve the established structures of society, marriage among them.¹⁴

Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria in the late second century borrowed directly from the works of Musonius and Plutarch to forge a Christian theology of marriage that harmonized with the prevailing philosophical ideals. The Christian literature that appears in the second century does not give sustained attention to marriage. Ignatius does so by insisting that men and women who marry be united with the approval of the bishop."¹⁵

Remarriage after the death of a spouse is also the topic favored by Tertullian. Tertullian advises his wife against remarriage after his death, although he admits that remarriage is no sin. He had begun to move away from his early position. He argues that

¹²Ibid., 3.

¹³Ibid., 4.

¹⁴Ibid., 5.

¹⁵Ibid., 9.

to remarry is to oppose God's positive will; since God prefers single marriage, it is a sin to remarry.¹⁶ Tertullian's development on the question of remarriage is to be attributed to his progressive enchantment with Montanism. The Montanists held rigorous positions regarding marriage and martyrdom, encouraging the latter and discouraging the former.¹⁷

Antignostic writers, such as Iremaeus and Tertullian, made a point of defending the goodness of marriage, especially against the views of Marcion and Tatian.¹⁸

As Christianity moved into its third century, few writers appear to have followed the direction of Clement's thinking on marriage. Instead, we find an increasing tendency for Christian writers to endorse various forms of the ascetic ideal, rejecting marriage.¹⁹

In the third century mainstream Christianity was characterized by a more moderate attitude toward marriage: the superiority of celibacy was maintained, but the permissibility of marriage was also upheld.²⁰

The conversion of the emperor Constantine to Christianity in the early fourth century and the gradual Christianization of the Roman Empire during the subsequent decade caused a shifting and refocusing of Christian thought and practice regarding remarriage.²¹

Later, in the fourth and early fifth centuries, teachers such as John Chrysostom and Augustine of Hippo retrieved some of these ideas to provide a new marital morality

¹⁶Ibid., 10.

¹⁷Ibid., 11.

¹⁸Ibid., 13.

¹⁹Ibid., 15.

²⁰Ibid., 16.

²¹Ibid., 19.

for Christians living in a changed social and political context. Later their teaching on marriage was “the most profound single revolution of the late classical period.”²² John Chrysostom on his attempt to Christianize the marital mores of Antiochene men, places a much greater emphasis on the love that husbands must show to their wives.²³ Augustine of Hippo maintains that marriage is a true good, not merely the lesser of two evils; he writes “Marriage and fornication... are not two evils, one of which is worse.”²⁴

The people of Israel were led to understand that their election, as God’s people, carried with its responsibilities and duties, which they, as a nation and as individuals, had to accept and fulfill.²⁵ Monogamy was the pattern for marriage in the life of the biblical community. From the inception of the institution according to Scripture, the marriage of Eve to Adam was a marriage made in perfect innocence. Most authors agree that at the time of Christ, the vast majority of the Jews practiced the monogamous form of marriage. They also agree that the monogamy was the common form of marriage among the Greeks and Romans of New Testament times.²⁶

The more traditional viewpoint holds that there can be found in the Old Testament an approbation of monogamy, and an implicit rejection of polygamy, for the people of God.²⁷ Polygamy is represented in the Bible. It was practiced for the bearing of children

²²Ibid., 9.

²³Ibid., 19.

²⁴Ibid., 23.

²⁵William G. Blum, *Monogamy Reconsidered* (Nairobi, KE: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), 172.

²⁶Ibid., 173.

²⁷Ibid.

and other reasons; we have the marriage of Abram to Hagar, who was his secondary wife. His behavior cannot be justified, far from the beginning it was not so. All the great leaders, and personages of Israel, who were involved in polygamous marriages lived before the Exile, and considerably before the time of the final editing of the Pentateuch and the historical books.²⁸

Almost every polygamous household, of which any extended account is given, exhibits the bickering and envy, sometimes breaking out into hatred and murder, which are the natural consequences of polygamy.²⁹

The *incestuous marriage* fits well with the historical background of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees. The Jewish readers of Matthew's Gospel were well aware of the incestuous marriage of the Herods, Archelous, Antipas and Agrippa II as reported by the historian Josephus.³⁰

In support of the incestuous marriage view, Joseph Fitzmeyer appeals to the Qumran scrolls to present evidence that there is first century Palestinian support for the interpretation of *porneia* in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9.³¹

²⁸Ibid., 174.

²⁹Ibid., 93.

³⁰H. Wayne House, *Divorce and Remarriage* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1990), 36.

³¹Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, "The Matthean Divorce Texts and some Palestinian Evidence" *Theological Studies* 37 (1976): 213 – 21.

God had a plan for the world and for humankind in particular, and that this plan included in its ambit: marriage and family life.³² The church, in its history, has also had a diversity of understanding about marriage. One of the primary concerns of the early church fathers was the relationship of our human marriage with the mystical relationship of Christ and the church.

The societal means of regulating marriage were manifold. The obvious method was to inculcate youth with the idea that they are wrong to marry without their parents' consent. Another way, as in France, was to have the government prohibit marriage without paternal consent before the age of 35.³³

Although parental veto power persisted to some extent into the nineteenth and twentieth century's, a degree of independence, nonetheless, did not sanction the acceptance of passionate love as a valid reason for marriage. Indeed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, marriage experts denounced passion as a basis for marriage, extolling *reason* in its stead.³⁴

Freedom of choice in marriage has continued to expand during the twentieth century. Women constitute an increasingly larger percentage of the work force, and they have moved into better paying jobs and ever closer to parity of status with men. The burgeoning population of singles today indicates that choice is more important than ever, and fewer are marrying because they have to. Parents of a young woman are no longer

³²William G. Blum, *Monogamy Reconsidered*, (Nairobi, KE: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 1989), 221.

³³Bernard I. Murstein, *Paths to Marriage*, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1986), 13.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 13.

asked for the right to propose to their daughter. Rather, the couple announces to their parents that they intend to marry, or that they have married.³⁵

Marriage began as a contract, as much between families as between the nominal participants. The elder's primary concern was family interest rather than welfare of the participants. When parental influence weakened, it was replaced by *reason* as the criterion of choice.³⁶

God designed the families of earth to be a symbol of the family in heaven. Marriage is undergoing change from a lifelong commitment to a less permanent contractual arrangement based on personal fulfillment. God's original plan for marriage is revealed in Genesis 2:24, a text which is quoted twice in the gospels (Mt 19:5; Mk 10:7, 8) and once in the epistles (Eph 5:31). This foundational passage reveals that marriage was divinely designed and instituted as a lifelong relationship. According to, Jay E. Adams in *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage*, Genesis 2:24 has three parts and mentions three things which are essential to marriage. He states: (1) A public act, *leaving* one's family with a view to establishing a new home; (2) a permanent bond, *cleaving* or being permanently bound in a partnership as husband and wife; (3) a physical embrace, becoming one *flesh* physically through sexual union.³⁷

The *Pentateuch* encompasses the first five books of the Old Testament: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. According to William B. Lasor, David A. Hubbard and Frederic W. Bush, Pentateuch derives from the Greek word *Petateuchos*,

³⁵Ibid., 21.

³⁶Ibid., 21, 22.

³⁷Jay E. Adams, *Marriage, Divorce, and Remarriage* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980), 58.

“five-volume (book).”³⁸ However, Jews called these books *Torah* which is rendered in English as *law*.³⁹ However, a careful study of the Hebrew does not limit Torah to *law*, but also *teaching* or *instruction*.

Herbert Wolf points that for the Jew the Pentateuch contained an authority that the rest of the Old Testament did not seem to equal. The five-volume book presents a coherent picture of the origins of mankind and the birth of a special people called to belong to God.⁴⁰ The Pentateuch contains a multiplicity of information that ranges from stories, incidents, laws, rituals, regulations, ceremonies, calendars, and exhortations.

The passage of scripture in the New Testament to write this project has been and continuous to be the subject of much debate and concern because it quotes the book of Genesis in the Pentateuch. It examines Matthew 19:4-6. This text has great importance for Christianity which becomes more intense with a consideration of God’s original plan for marriage. It reveals that marriage was divinely designed and instituted as a lifelong relationship. “The human covenant is not only like unto the divine, but draws its strength from the provisions made in the divine covenant. God promising to do for the couple what they could not do in their own strength.” The writer is drawn to this text because many are in the business of breaking covenant relationships. God is displeased toward those who make a vow they refuse to keep.

These verses of Matthew’s Gospel are part of a major section, which narrate the recommendations of marriage. The principle of unity accentuates the willingness of both

³⁸William S. Lasor, David A. Hubbard & Frederick W. Bush, *Old Testament Survey* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 3.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁰Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 18.

partners to blend their wills, goals, and means for the emergence of one flesh. The principle of faith, fullness in marriage shelters the unity of the couple from outside attacks, and from frivolity, capriciousness, and unfaithfulness within the marriage. The Christian enters this covenant with total devotion, pledging his or her utmost to love and cherish in sickness and in health. From these passages the inference is drawn that marriage is an institution of God, designed to be permanent, and not to be annulled by man.⁴¹

This historical cultural setting for the text takes place while Jesus was traveling through Transjordan on His way to Jerusalem for his last Passover. In Perea, the territory ruled by Herod Antipas, the Pharisees confronted Jesus with the question: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his for any cause at all?” It marked the central point when Christ began to move towards Jerusalem. Matthew in this passage illustrates the permanence of marriage as the will of God. In Matthew 19:4-5, Jesus answered the Pharisees: “He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said: “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” According to God, marriage involves a partnership commitment to which the husband and wife must be loyal. “The biblical concept of covenant suggests the idea of being super glued together, bound inseparably by a commitment to a lifelong relationship.”

The concept of one flesh seems to imply that the marriage bond is indissoluble. Certainly, Genesis 2:24 make no provision for divorce. Jesus acknowledges that from the

⁴¹F. F. Bruce, *Understanding the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: A. J. Holman Company, 1998), 62.

beginning marriage was designed to be lifelong and permanent (Mt 19:8). The Bible defines marriage as God's act of joining a man and a woman in a permanent, one-flesh relationship. Marriage involves a vow or promise which makes the obligation binding.⁴²

Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 warns of God's displeasure toward those who make a vow they refuse to keep. Lewis B. Smedes has written, "When you make a promise, you have created a small sanctuary of trust within the jungle of unpredictability. Human destiny rests on a promise freely given and reliably remembered."⁴³

By the time of Moses, Israelite men were orally divorcing their wives as was the custom among heathen nations. The rejected wife would have no recourse but to leave home. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is a key Old Testament text dealing with this issue. There are several circumstances mentioned in the Old Testament for which divorce is specifically prohibited. Moses did not institute divorce; he acknowledged it as taking place and sought to curb that which clearly contradicted God's original design for marriage. There was something of a stigma (social or moral) attached to a divorced woman. The laws in the Old Testament promote the ideal of a lifelong partnership.⁴⁴

It is not easy to find a comprehensive definition of marriage. This project will report three different definitions in an effort to analyze their contents to determine the essential features of marriage. The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines marriage as: "A legally recognized union entered into by a man and a woman usually

⁴²Renald E. Shower, *Lawfully Wedded* (Langhorne, PA: Philadelphia College of the Bible, 1983), 36.

⁴³Lewis B. Smedes, "Controlling Unpredictable: The power of Promising," *Christianity Today*, January 21, 1983, 17.

⁴⁴R. Yaron, "The Restitution of Marriage," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 17 (1996): 1-15.

with the intention of living together and having sexual relations, and entailing property and inheritance rights.”⁴⁵

This definition is secular; it presents recognition of the union by the law of the land as the first feature. It mentions the sexes of the parties involved in the union, and also speaks about property ownership as an aspect of the union. Ember and Ember, with an anthropological background, defined marriage as: “A socially approved sexual and economic union between a woman and man. It is presumed, both by the couple and by others, to be more or less permanent, and it subsumes reciprocal rights and obligations between two spouses and between spouses and their future children.”⁴⁶

Additional elements of marriage that are mentioned by Ember and Ember are that it is a sexual and an economic union; it is presumed to be a permanent union; it entails rights and obligations to and by the parties involved. Ember and Ember further amplified these elements: they pointed out that marriage is a socially approved sexual union so that the couple does not have to hide the sexual nature of their relationship. Second, although the union may ultimately be dissolved by divorce, couples in all societies begin had some idea of permanence of marriage in mind. Third, the marriage relationship implies reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties tend to be specific and formalized regarding property, finances, and child rearing.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Murdock stresses the fact that marriage entails a sexual and an economic relationship.

⁴⁵The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, S. V. “Marriage.”

⁴⁶Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember, *Cultural Anthropology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993), 166.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

Sexual unions without economic co-operation are common, and there are relationships between men and women involving a division of labor without sexual gratification e.g., between brother and sister, master and maidservant, or employer and secretary, but marriage exists only when the economic and the sexual are united in one relationship, and this combination occurs only in marriage.⁴⁸

Woolsey recognizes that marriage is the basis of society in his definition of marriage: Is that union of a male and a female being without which there could be no family, no parental care, no developed political communities, and no general society of mankind.⁴⁹ Pike, from the standpoint of a Christian writer identifies free willingness, mutual affection, mutual agreement, and exclusive relationship as other elements of marriage: The volunteer compact between one man and one woman based upon mutual affection, whereby they agree to live together as husband and wife, until separated by death.⁵⁰

The definition of marriage is first recorded in the creation account (Gn 2:24); this is what Christ affirmed in Mt 19:4-6: “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, for this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?”

⁴⁸George P. Murdock, *Social Structure* (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1949), 8, quoted in Ember and Ember, 166.

⁴⁹T. D. Woolsey, “Marriage,” *A Religious Encyclopedia or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology* (1891), 3: 1411.

⁵⁰Paul H. Pike, “A Biblical Study of Marriage” (B. D. thesis, Western Evangelical Seminary, 1956), 2.

So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.⁵¹

This is the sole description of a husband-wife relationship to be found in Scripture. The text also describes the process of arriving at the union. In other words, with inherent sexual desires are joined together by their Creator, through sexual union, to become one.⁵²

The Bible has no single word for marriage. The words translated as *marriage* do not specifically define what marriage is. They are words like *to take, accept, bring, to carry away, to be master, to have dominion over, to be praised, to shine, to celebrate*. All of them are translated as marriage.⁵³

Hebrew words for Marriage in the Old Testament: *Laquach*: The basic meaning is to take, to accept, to bring, to carry away. It is used 966 times in the Old Testament, and over 800 times it is translated *to take*; in over 100 references it refers to the taking of wives; it is translated marriage only four times. For example when Eliezer *took* Rebekah back to Isaac, Isaac brought her into her mother's tent and *took* Rebekah sexually; as a result she became his wife (Gn 24:61, 67). The same word is used synonymously with sexual intercourse: before the flood they *took* wives of all they chose (Gn6:2). *Baal*: The prime root means *to be master*. It implies ownership or to have dominion which is by implication to be a husband. This word is used 83 times, but it is only translated *marriage*

⁵¹Mt 19:4-6.

⁵²Lawrence J. Friesen, "Marriage: A Biblical Model in Historical Perspective" (D. Min. dissertation, Biola University, 1990), 59-62.

⁵³See Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1936), 646 and James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), S. V. "Marriage."

eight times; 11 times it makes reference to a husband; all other instances refer to ownership in contexts other than marriage. *Chatan*: This word is used to describe the making of a marriage. It is used 63 times, and translated as *marriage* only three times.

Greek root word for marriage in the New Testament is from the word: *Ginomai*: (Rom 7:4) the meaning of this word is simply *to cause to be* or *to cause to become*. It is used over 1000 times in the New Testament; it is translated marriage only three times in Romans 7. All other times it is translated as *to be*, *to be made*, *to come*, *to pass*. But at the time of translation of the King James Version of the Bible it was translated as marriage because in seventeenth-century Europe, a young man taking a young lady sexually is what made them *become* husband and wife.⁵⁴

Bromiley in his biblical study on marriage confirms that God is the author of the marriage union, that it corresponds to His will for the human race.⁵⁵ God's original plan is first introduced in Genesis 1:26-28. Three observations can be made concerning the above account as related to marriage.

First, the two persons were made in the image of God. The term man is used in a generic sense to include both male and female. The text does not imply that the male was created in the image of God and the female in the image of man. Both were made in the image of God. Pike notes that the basic implication in the text is that man was made as a morally responsible being capable of rightly interpreting the meaning and significance of life, and the will of God for man.⁵⁶ Second, the two persons were made male and female.

⁵⁴Friensen. 68-70.

⁵⁵Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *God and Marriage* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM B. Eerdmans, 1981), 3.

⁵⁶Pike, 5.

his would enable them to form a perfect union; man and woman would come together in a sexual union that would serve as a means of propagation of their kind and unite them in love. Thus mankind's moral nature and physical nature enabled them to carry out a perfect union. They had the necessary physical qualifications to form a perfect union.⁵⁷

The third observation is that the male and female were given specific instructions to be fruitful and multiply, to replenish the earth. This shows that they had God's approval and sanction. And as in all God's creation God had ordained that the two kinds (male and female) should produce fruit after their kind. Reproduction is one of the divine purposes of marriage.⁵⁸

Marriage is God's gift to man; it was intended to provide belonging. By the first marriage God gave the family a basic social unity, providing a sense of belonging and giving individuals in it an opportunity to develop into well-rounded persons. The home is a setting ordained by God for the restoration of the image of God in humanity. God intended the home to be a place where the members could express themselves fully; where members would find love, belonging, and intimacy; where individual identity and feelings of personal worth would be developed; a place where the principles of Christianity would be put in practice.⁵⁹

After the creation of man God said it was not good for the man to be alone (Gn 2: 18). Adam was unique compared to all the animals God had made: There was no creature comparable to him. The Hebrew word *neged* translated *comparable* is a noun related to

⁵⁷Ibid., 6.

⁵⁸Pike, 6.

⁵⁹Pike, 8.

the preposition that means to stand *before*, in front of, opposite, corresponding to *someone or something*. Adam longed for a being that would stand before him, to complement him, to correspond to him as his counterpart.⁶⁰

Therefore God said God would make man a “help meet for him” (Gn 2:18), or a help suitable for him. Man’s companion or help was to correspond to him. Each was to be suited to the other’s needs. Adam’s helper could not be found among the creatures God had already made: “So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him”(Gn 2:20).

Wenham further describes Adam’s help as matching him, “a phrase which expresses complementarity rather than identity. The help Adam longed for was not just assistance in his daily work or in procreation, though these aspects may be included, but the mutual support companionship provides.⁶¹ So God instituted marriage to provide companionship and intimate fellowship for men and women.

What was the significance of the deep sleep Adam was put into? Wenham observes that heavy sleep is often divinely induced (as seen in Is 29:10; 1 Sm 26:12), and also the occasion for divine revelation (Gn 15:12; Job 4:13). Another explanation is that God’s ways are mysterious and are not for human observation.⁶²

Sailhamer adds that the recipient of God’s provision sleeps while God acts, and that most likely the purpose of sleep was anesthetic. Furthermore, man’s sleep in the face

⁶⁰Pike, 12.

⁶¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 68.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 69.

of divine activity appears to be intended to portray a sense of passivity and acceptance of the divine provision.⁶³

It is significant to note that the woman, Adam's mate, was made from Adam's rib. God did not choose man's companion from some other beings but from man. Ellen White states, woman was to be of the same substance from the man. If she had been taken from his feet that man may have cause him to degrade and enslave or trample on her; God did not make her from the head of Adam, that the woman might assume authority over man; God made woman of substance from the man's side, near his heart, the seat of affections, that the woman might be at his side as his equal.⁶⁴

Wehman thinks that just as the rib is found at the side of man and is attached to him, so Eve was meant to stand at Adam's side to be his helper; her soul was to be bound up with his.⁶⁵ Marriage was not only to provide companionship and intimate fellowship for men and women; God ordained marriage also for procreation (Gn 1:28). This means that sexual union in marriage is honorable (Heb. 13:14). Also according to Genesis 2:25 the first couple knew no shame; they were naked but were not ashamed of their nakedness. This implies that God's plan for marriage included an intimate knowledge of the mysteries of both sexes: "Adam knew Eve his wife" (Gn 4:1). The Scripture implies that intimate knowledge of sex life is to be known fully only by two persons, it is an

⁶³John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis, the Espositor's Bible Commentary*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 46.

⁶⁴Ellen White, *The Story of Patriarchs and Prophets* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 46.

⁶⁵Wehman, 69.

integral part of the sacred act of marriage. If a third party comes into this intimate knowledge, adultery is committed.⁶⁶

Marriage was also ordained to promote social order and human happiness, to prevent irregular affection, and through well-regulated families to transmit truth, purity and holiness from age to age. Marriage has a part to play in humanity's redemption: it is a spiritual as well as a physical relationship. The Old Testament condemned mixed marriages not so much because of fear of racial mixture, but the interdiction was aimed at preventing spiritual adulteration.⁶⁷ Abraham made his servant Eliezer swear not to find Isaac a wife among Canaanite women (Gn 24:3); the numerous foreign wives of Solomon cause him to turn his heart away from God (Neh 13:25). In the post-exilic period, mixed marriages were severely condemned by Ezra (Ez 9-10) and Nehemiah (Neh 10-13). In the New Testament, Paul warns against marriages with non-Christians (2 Cor 6:14), and widows are advised to marry within the faith (1 Cor 7:39).

Hebrew marriage did not follow one pattern all the time. It was adapted to the situations in which the Hebrews found themselves during the course of their history. However, they still maintained their own peculiarity. The Hebrews lived among a number of people in the Near East; they interacted in various ways with the Egyptians, Philistines, Hittites, the Aramaeans, the Hurrians, Assyrians, and Babylonians to name but a few. This intermingling influenced the Hebrew customs, mores, and laws.⁶⁸

⁶⁶Pike, 6-7.

⁶⁷Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Cultural Aspects of Marriage in the Ancient World", *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 135:5239 (July 1978).

⁶⁸Gottlieb Claire, "Varieties of Marriage in the Bible: And their Analogues in the Ancient World" (Ph. D. dissertation, New York University, 1989), viii.

The Hebrews travelled broadly and were influenced by the ethnic groups they came into contact with, such as the Canaanites, Egyptians, Babylonians, and people of the Aegean lands. They were also influenced by Hurrians, Indo-European Hittites, and Philistines. This period is called the heroic age of Hebrew history.⁶⁹

When the Hebrews entered Canaan, they came with a unique concept of culture which was a by-product of interaction with all the people they met in their travels. And while in Canaan the Hebrews developed yet a new form of culture as a result of the new social, economic, and political conditions they experienced in Canaan. Canaan was a crossroad for the ancient east and west. That implies that their cultural institutions were dynamic and rich with lots of contact with different people.⁷⁰

In the Old Testament times no minimum age for marriage is stated. However, a *betulah* was an adolescent girl of marriageable age. Marriage was arranged by the parents; the mother could play a role (Gn 21:21; 27:46) although the father could act alone. Although it was not essential, the bride's consent was at times asked for (Gn 24:5, 58). Romance was involved in some of the matches (Gn 24:20; Jdg 14:1-3; 1 Sm 18:20; Songs of Solomon).

In the Jewish Talmud marriage was recommended for girls at age of puberty; males were advised to marry between 14-18 years of age. Before that age a girl could not refuse a marriage arranged by her father. But after that age her assent was essential.⁷¹

⁶⁹Ibid., 3.

⁷⁰Ibid., 5.

⁷¹Isaac Levy, "Marriage Preliminaries," in *Jewish Marriage*, ed. Peter Elman (London, UK: Soncino Press, 1967), 47-48.

The New Testament does not have reference to a specific minimum age for marriage, although 1 Corinthians 7:36 possibly concerns a father who was anxious about his daughter having passed the age of marriage.⁷²

Early Christians followed the Roman precedent: 12 were accepted as the minimum age of marriage for girls and 14 for boys. Christian parents selected the groom; the daughter had the right to refuse the groom or not to marry at all.⁷³

In the Old Testament, fathers selected brides for their sons (Gn 24:3; 38:6). Where the wishes of the son were consulted the proposal was made by the father (Gn 34:4, 8; Jdg 14:2); where there was no father, the mother selected the bride for her son (Gn 21: 21). Besides the customary presents given to the bride and her relatives (Gn 24:53), a bride-price (Mohar) was stipulated to be paid to the father of the girl (Gn 31:15; 34:12; 1 Sm 18:23, 25; Ex 22:17); the price was either in money (Dt 22:29) or services rendered (Gn 29:20; Jo 15:16; 1 Sam 17:25; 18: 25).⁷⁴

Betrothal in the Old Testament created a legally binding relationship. Even before he married her, Jacob, for example, called Rachel, *my wife* (Gn 29:21; Dt 22:23-24; 1 Sm 3:14). The bride-price, however, represented compensation rather than actual purchase.⁷⁵ Examples of bride-price payment include: Genesis 34:1. Shechem was willing to pay any

⁷²S. R. Driver, Alfred Plummer, Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh T. and A. Clark, 1944), 158.

⁷³Yamauchi, 241-243.

⁷⁴B. Pick, "Marriage Among Hebrews," *A Religious Encyclopedia or Dictionary of Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology*, ed. Philip Schaff (1891), 3: 1415-1416.

⁷⁵Millar Burrows, *Basis of Israelite Marriage* (New Haven, CT: American Oriental Society, 1938), 13-15.

price for Dinah; 1 Samuel 18:28. Saul demanded a bride-price of a hundred foreskins of Philistines for his daughter.

In the Rabbinic period the bride-price became nominal. The betrothal also was legally binding and could not be broken except by death or divorce.⁷⁶ Joseph, for example, shows the serious legal implications of the betrothal: when he discovered before the wedding that Mary, his betrothal, was pregnant, he wanted to divorce her on grounds of adultery (Mt 1:19).

The Ketubbah was a legal document containing a statement of the obligations that the ⁷⁷bridegroom undertook toward his bride. It was a marriage contract, a prerequisite to marriage, developed possibly during the Babylonian exile or after the return to Jerusalem. The document was instituted for the economic protection of a divorced or widowed woman. The financial obligations assumed by the husband in ketubbah were meant to serve as an impediment to hasty divorces. Under the provisions of the ketubbah the minimum amount paid to a widow or divorcee who was a virgin at the time of marriage was 200 zuzim. If the bride was not a virgin at the time of marriage the amount was 100 zuzim.⁷⁸

According to Neufeld, marriage among the Hebrews was legally valid when bridal gifts were paid to the father of the bride and accepted by the bride. The woman was regarded as the man's wife from that point. But the marriage was not consummated until the bride was taken to her husband's house and had sexual intercourse with him with

⁷⁶Yamauchi, 244-5.

⁷⁷E. Neufeld, *Ancient Hebrew Marriage Laws* (London, UK: n. p., 1944), 95.

⁷⁸Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion (1997), R. V. "ketubbah."

women slaves and captives, marriages were arranged without any ceremonies; as long as the husband had sexual intercourse with her (Gn 30:4; Dt 21:13) it was considered a marriage.⁷⁹

This section explores the essential biblical requirements for establishing a marriage. The discussion is based mainly on Genesis 2:23, 24.

A *leaving* must happen in coupling. When Adam woke up from his deep sleep God introduced the partner he had created for him. As soon as Adam set eyes on Eve he broke out into poetry, according to Genesis 2: 23. There is parallelism between the first and second verses, and between the fourth and fifth verses; there is a word play on *man* and *woman*, all typical features of Hebrew poetry.⁸⁰ Adam rejoiced to see a person with whom he could share intimate fellowship, one who corresponded to him mentally, physically, and spiritually, completing his incompleteness.

The first part of vs. 24 states, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother...” Isaksson observes that verse 24 is not a commandment but a statement of an already established fact, that a young man leaves his parents’ house in order to form a new social unit with his wife.⁸¹

Similarly Skinner points out that verse 24 is the observation of the narrator; it is neither a prophecy nor a recommendation of monogamic marriage. The statement is an answer to the question: “what is the meaning of that universal instinct which impels a

⁷⁹Neufeld, quoted in Isaksson, 25.

⁸⁰Wenham, 70.

⁸¹Isaksson, 19.

man to separate from his parents and cling to his wife.⁸² The Hebrew word for leave used in Genesis 2: 24, had three basic meanings: to *depart*, to *abandon*, and to *lose*.⁸³ Brown, Driver, and Briggs state that *for sake* is the specific meaning for *leave* as used in Genesis 2:24.⁸⁴

Frangella notes the various usages of the word *forsake* in the Bible. First this word is used in Isaiah 55:7 and is about forsaking of thought and way of life. Second, Isaiah 54:6 speaks of one forsaken in spirit. In Proverbs 2:17 leave is used to show a forsaking of lifelong teaching and commitment. He concludes that *leaving* according to the above usages is not referring to a change of geographic location. When used in Genesis 2:24 it refers to an intellectual, emotional, and willful separation of son or daughter from a mother and father.⁸⁵

The traditional translation *leaving* to suggest a man moving from his parents and setting up a home elsewhere is challenged by Wineham. He argues that Israelite marriage was usually patrilocal: the man continued to live near his parents' home. It was the wife who left home to join her husband. So it is preferable to translate *leave* as *forsake*. He further cautions that Israel is instructed not to forsake the poor or the covenant (Dt 12:19; 14: 27; 29:24). Also God promises not to forsake Israel (Dt 31:8; Jo 1:5).

So forsaking father and mother must be understood in a relative sense not an

⁸²John Skinner, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis", *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1980), 70.

⁸³Carl Schultz, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (1980), 2: 658.

⁸⁴Francis Brown, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament with an Appendix containing the Biblical Aramaic* (1952), S. V.

⁸⁵Charles Frangella, *Biblical Requirements for Establishing a Marriage* (M. A. Thesis, Multomah School of the Bible, 1982), 20.

absolute sense. For example, Jesus spoke of hating father, mother, wife, and children in Luke 14:26. Therefore, on marriage a man's priorities change; before getting married his first obligations are to his parents, after words they are to his wife.⁸⁶

Frangella summarizes the first biblical requirement of establishing a marriage that leaving is severance from mother and father by a man and a woman getting married; both are to leave their parents intellectually, emotionally, and willfully. It involves a complete break and recognition that the parents are no longer head or responsible for the man/woman and the establishment of a new social unit under the headship of the husband.⁸⁷

The significance of *leaving* is expressed by Keil and Delitzsch by emphasizing the qualitative differences in the relationship one has with his/her parents and his/her spouse.

By the *leaving* of father and mother, who applies to the woman as well as to the man, the conjugal union is shown to be a spiritual oneness, a vital communion of heart as well as body... This union is of a totally different nature from that of parents and children... Marriage itself, notwithstanding the fact that it demands the *leaving* of father and mother, is a holy appointment of God.⁸⁸

Cleaving, ticking the phrase cleave unto his wife of Gen. 2: 24 is interpreted by Wineham as *sticks to his wife*. He sees the phrase as suggesting both passion and permanence of marriage. For example, Schechem's love for Dinah is described as "his soul stuck to Dinah" (Gn 34: 3). Also the tribes of Israel are assured that they will stick to

⁸⁶Wenham, 71.

⁸⁷Frangella, 38-39.

⁸⁸C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The First Book of Moses*, trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1951), 1: 90-91.

their inheritances; in other words it will be theirs permanently (Nm 36:7, 9). Israel is also urged to stick to the Lord (Dt 10:20; 11:22; 13:5).⁸⁹

Welded is a farming term. *Wheat* and wheat identify cleaving as “to be welded inseparably” so that each becomes a part of the other. Therefore, the man is to be totally committed to his wife.⁹⁰

Kalland explains that dābag also carries the sense of clinging to someone in affection and loyalty. Man is to cleave to his wife, Ruth clave to Naomi (Ruth 1:14) and Solomon clave in love to his wives (1 King 11:2).⁹¹

Wallis commenting on the use of dābag states: The Hebrew root dbg is used figuratively in passages that have to do with relationships between people. ...dbg is used in a positive sense of a man cleaving to his wife (Gen. 2:24) Dbg, however, does not denote a sexual relationship... It expresses rather a strong exotic or even a friendly affection toward someone.⁹² So to Wallis, cleave means a relationship other than sexual union.

Commitment, Frangella summarizes this second biblical requirement for establishing a marriage: Cleaving signifies permanence. Sexual intercourse alone is not an adequate meaning is a better meaning is to be *committed*, to show loyalty, trust,

⁸⁹Wenham, 71.

⁹⁰Ed Wheat and Gaye Wheat, *Intended for Pleasure*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), 17.

⁹¹Earl S. Kalland, “dabag,” *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. By R. Laird H. thesis, (1980), 1” 178.

⁹²Halle G. Wallis, “dābag” *Theological Dictionary of The Old Testament*, 1964-74, 3: 79-84.

faithfulness, honesty leading to joining or gluing of husband and wife. Cleaving was also found to be an intellectual, emotional and will full act.⁹³

Furthermore, Frangella argues that when Genesis 2:24 is compared to the context of Ruth 1:11-17, it is evident that *cleave* means to intellectually, emotionally, and willfully cling or adhere to another in the form of a relationship. He also observes that the text in Genesis 2:24 uses cleaving and leaving together; whereby leaving is seen as a woman or man severing their relationship from parents, and cleaving is viewed as a man and woman committing themselves to one another to form a new relationship.⁹⁴

In *Becoming One Flesh*, Brown, Driver, and Briggs translate flesh *bāsār* as kindred or blood-relations⁹⁵ linking that meaning to Genesis 2:23-24. According to Schweizer, flesh is for external and visible corporeality denoting the sphere of human relations.⁹⁶ Lynch adds that the term *bāsār* comes from a root meaning muscular tissue or skin. However, the real meanings are the totality of the person and never flesh in the distinction from the entire being.⁹⁷

Oswalt describes *bāsār* as referring to more than just physical flesh: In Hebrew the word refers basically to animal musculature, but by extension it can mean the human body, blood relations, mankind, living things, life itself and created life as opposed to divine life... In this way to refer to someone as being of one's own 'flesh and bone'

⁹³Frangella, 38-39.

⁹⁴Ibid., 23.

⁹⁵Brown, BDB, S. V. 11.

⁹⁶G. Schweizer, *Theological Seminary of the New Testament*, 1964-74, 17: 99-151.

⁹⁷W. E. Lynch, "Flesh," *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: McGraw Hill, 1967) 5: 961.

(Gen. 2:23) was to say more than they shared the same bodily heritage. Again, to say that a man and woman become one flesh in the sexual embrace to (Gen. 2:24) is to say more than that they are united bodily.⁹⁸

Thiselton compares *flesh* in the Old Testament and *flesh* in the New Testament, but explains the use in full in relation to (Gen. 2:24): ‘Sarx mia’ (Matt.19:56) has a special significance as the translation of the Hebrew ‘basar ehal’ (one flesh) of Genesis 2:24. The union of man and woman (marriage) creates a new relationship. ‘One flesh’ does not in the first instance mean sexual intercourse, though it includes it. It signifies the coming into being of a unitary existence, a complete partnership of man and woman which cannot be broken up without damage to the partners in it... This complete partnership is the promise of marriage... It is the meaning... granted by God.⁹⁹

In *Psychosomatic Union*, F. F. Bruce offers a more inclusive interpretation of flesh according to 1 Corinthians 6:16. One body: a variation on the ‘one flesh’ of Genesis 2:24 probably because the body is the explicit subject of the immediately preceding sentence. In any case, a psychosomatic union, not a merely physical one, is implied.¹⁰⁰ Thus F. F. Bruce relates *flesh* to the whole person, but his emphasis is *one flesh* specifically referring to a psychosomatic union.

In *Human Self at the Point of Decision*, Barret supports Bruce’s idea of one flesh referring to the whole person in 1 Corinthians 6:16, but he goes on to add an interesting

⁹⁸John N. Oswalt, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed, R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, JR., and Bruce K. Watke (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1980), 1:136.

⁹⁹A. C. Thiselton, “flesh” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theologie* (NIDNTT), ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 1: 678.

¹⁰⁰F. F. Bruce, *I and II Corinthians*, *New Century Bible Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 54.

dimension: “ The word ‘body’ might seem at first sight to have suited Paul’s argument better than ‘flesh’, but he quotes Genesis 2:24, and in fact derives from it the means of taking an important step forward. In this anthropology ‘body’ is a neutral term in that it represents the human self at the place of decision. It may be the servant of sin or the servant of righteousness. If one places his body at the disposal of a harlot, and so becomes one body with her; the body has taken the wrong turning and becomes flesh, which for Paul has often... a bad sense, signifying human nature perverted... not perverted because it is material but because as a totality it has fallen away from God and is living anthropocentrically.”

Kinship Formula, the verses that Adam uttered when he first saw Eve: “This is now bone of my bones; and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23) were the traditional Hebrew kinship formula, affirms Wenham. When Laban met Jacob his nephew, for example, he said “You are my bone and my flesh” (Gen. 29:14; see also Judges 9: 2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19: 12-14).

Whereas in English *blood relationships* are spoken of, in Hebrew one’s relatives were referred to as one’s “flesh and bone,” which can be easily related to woman’s creation from the rib; she literally came from Adam’s bone. Wenham further observes that the fact that Adam recognized Eve as his kin set the two apart from the animals. Adam did not call them his kin when he saw them. Adam and Eve were equal humans.¹⁰¹

Similarly, marriage creates a kinship (flesh and bone) relation between man and wife. They become related to each other, the woman becomes on marriage a sister to the

¹⁰¹Wenham, 70.

husband's brothers, a daughter to her father-in-law.¹⁰² Becoming one flesh therefore does not necessarily imply sexual union in marriage or the children born during marriage... though these are important in the process of becoming one flesh.

In one Personality, Davidson suggests that becoming one flesh in marriage means becoming one personality. He contends that flesh is just the medium through which the whole personality communicates its varied emotions, longings, and joys.¹⁰³ He cites Psalm 84:2 to support his proposal: "My soul longs, yes even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God." He views *heart and flesh* as literally referring to the *whole being*.

Genesis 2:24 reveals that there are three aspects to a man and woman becoming married: leaving, cleaving, and becoming one flesh. Leaving is reverence from mother and father by man and woman, no longer depending on them emotionally and economically, in order to form a new social unit under the headship of the husband. Leaving parents does not mean abandoning them; the man and woman continue to love, respect, and care for their parents. But they do not depend on their parents for care.

A leaving must occur before cleaving can take place. All lesser relationships must be left for the purpose of cementing the new relationship. Cleaving reflects the concept of covenant fidelity. The Hebrew word for cleave, dābag, suggests that the idea of permanently being glued or joined together. Cleaving means wholehearted commitment

¹⁰²Ibid., 71.

¹⁰³Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1-11, The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 38.

to one's spouse that spills over into all areas of life. Cleaving involves unswerving loyalty to one's marital partner.¹⁰⁴

Leaving and cleaving result in a union that the Bible calls a mystery (Eph. 5:31, 32); it is oneness in the full sense. At the onset this oneness refers to the physical union, but it goes beyond that to include an intimate bond of mind and emotions: the married couple shares a deep intimacy.

On becoming one flesh Walter Trobisch had this to say: Two persons share everything they have, not only their bodies, not only their material possessions, but also their thinking and their feeling, their joy and their suffering, their hopes and their fears, their successes and their failures. To become one flesh means that two persons become completely joined with body, soul and spirit, and yet they remain two different persons.¹⁰⁵

However, Swindoll cautions that becoming one flesh is a gradual process: Becoming one flesh suggests a process, not an instant fact. Two people with different backgrounds, temperaments, habits, scars, feelings, parents, educational pursuits... don't... leave a wedding ceremony in perfect unity. The process begins there.¹⁰⁶

Brown in agreement with Swindoll says that the kind of relationship which leads to one flesh has to be cultivated; it is "a process, a state which is built slowly over the years."¹⁰⁷ The Bible does not have one word for marriage. The words translated as

¹⁰⁴Bacchiocchi, 27-28.

¹⁰⁵Walter Trobisch, *I Married You* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1971), 18.

¹⁰⁶Charles Swindoll, *Strike the Original Match* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 31.

¹⁰⁷Stanley C. Brown, *God's Plan for Marriage* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977), 74.

marriage were words denoting to take, accept, bring, carry away, to be master, to have dominion over.¹⁰⁸

As a result of this lack of definition, the emphasis must be put on the process of becoming as Paul uses it (*ginomai*) in Romans 7:3, 4. The Hebrew root of this word means to cause to be or to become. In other words, biblical marriage is arrived at by taking sexually and in taking to become one flesh.¹⁰⁹

Before the giving of the Law to Moses there were no recorded principles which constituted a husband/wife relationship. Knowledge of these principles must have been verbally transmitted from generation to generation.¹¹⁰ If the term marriage was used to refer to the activities of the pre-flood residents, it can be concluded that those were marriages without commitment.¹¹¹

During Abraham's time a girl was considered an adult at 12 and half years of age. By that age most girls were betrothed. Once a girl was betrothed, bride-price was agreed on, the girl was offered gifts, and her acceptance of these gifts meant that she had accepted the man to be her husband. After payment of the bride-price the couple would retire to the bridal chamber and sexually consummate the marriage.¹¹²

According to the Gospel of Matthew 1:18-25, Mary was betrothed to Joseph and was considered his wife. When Joseph learned of Mary's pregnancy, he assumed that she

¹⁰⁸Lamm, 145.

¹⁰⁹Friesen, 143-144.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*, 135-136.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 137-139.

¹¹²Lamm, 146.

had broken the betrothal vow. However, when Joseph was informed by the angel that Mary had conceived by the Holy Spirit, and that he should not put her away, he accepted her as his wife. Mary and Joseph also met the biblical requirements for marriage: Life commitment as symbolized by the engagement contract.¹¹³

Today more than at any other time in human history, marriage is under serious attack. Newspaper and news magazine articles carry stories about experiments in marriage. Christians are experiencing problems in marriage relationships. Some people today are asking questions about the ability of the marriage to survive as an institution.

Can the family survive? Ask anthropologist Margaret Mead. "Marriage bonds are loosening under the strains of broad social and economic shifts in the nation at large. For those who believe in the sanctity and perpetuity of marriage, it is encouraging to note that not all of what is being written today about marriage is negative."¹¹⁴

The idea that only the non-Christian couples are in trouble, if it has ever been true, is no longer true today. Christians and non-Christians are both under great pressure from modern society to abandon their commitments to each other and let the family die like a sinking ship beneath the ocean waves of change. The writer must admit that some couples in his local congregation are in trouble. The apostle Peter says: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." W. Mac Donald & J. Farstad explicitly explain how to be sober: "To be

¹¹³Ibid., 165.

¹¹⁴Time, December 28, 1970; 34.

sober means to be serious-minded, to take a realistic approach to life, to be intelligent concerning the stratagems of Satan.”¹¹⁵

The writer is convinced that families in the local church are experiencing a divorce rate that is higher than ever before. He has come to realize that many married couples are experiencing unhappiness and lack of fulfillment. Some husbands and wives have stopped caring for or communicating with each other. We must face the reality of the situation that serious problems exist in our churches. How can it be solved? Whenever two people are not getting along well with each other, there is a high probability that one is having some degree of difficulty in getting along with God. The church has both an opportunity and a responsibility to help families grow spirituality, and become better environments for learning how to love. The development of true love for both God and man is seen as the most viable solution to the problems facing Christian married couples.

Should the church, in its commitment to maintain its purity or orthodoxy to the historical ideals for Christian marriage, ignore the needs and feelings of a church member when the marriage fails? It has been a search for God’s perspective versus man’s perspective.

The Bible offers the most complete source of help for both husbands and wives. Within the Bible one finds the purposes and functions of marriage; in other words, God’s plan for marriage and the duties and responsibilities of partners in marriage. The following duties of the husband are outlined in scripture: The husband is to be the wife’s

¹¹⁵W. Mac Donald, and A. Farstad, *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson 1997).

leader. “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the church: and he is the savior of the body” (Eph. 5:23).¹¹⁶ The leadership which the husband is to give is compared to the leadership that Christ gives the church. Christ’s method of leadership was the role of a servant (Matt. 20:28). This leadership is not dictatorial but includes an attitude of submission.

He is to live with the wife in an understanding way, “You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way” (1Peter 3:7).¹¹⁷ In the divine, ideal home is a husband who is interested in his wife’s viewpoint. He has a real desire to understand her, her emotional needs as well as her dreams and aspirations. This understanding is an important part of achieving oneness.

He loves his wife as Christ loved the church. “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her” (Eph. 5: 25).¹¹⁸ Christ’s love for His church is a sacrificial love. Not only did he live to serve, but he died for the church. He bore the guilt and shame which we deserve. He paid the penalty of death for the church. His was an unselfish and enduring love, a love which knows no limits. Paul says, “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church.”

He is his wife’s lover. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. “For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his body but the wife does” (1Cor. 7:3, 4). These verses express shared sexual experiences. A husband is to recognize

¹¹⁶Eph 5:23.

¹¹⁷1Pt 3:7.

¹¹⁸Eph 5:25.

his wife's right to a meaningful emotionally and physically satisfying sexual experience, just as much as he desires a happy and fulfilling sexual life.

He finds satisfaction in his wife's love. "A loving doe, a graceful deer - may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love" (Prov. 5: 19).¹¹⁹ God plan is for the husband to find happiness, contentment and exhilaration in his wife's love. When the husband experiences this, he will not fall in adultery.

The following duties of the wife are outlined in scripture: She submits or is subject to her husband. "Wives, submit to your husband's as to the Lord" (Eph. 5: 22).¹²⁰ There is much which could be said about what subjection includes or does not include; however, I will limit my comments to two. First, if a wife marries a man who manifests the characteristics of the ideal husband, the idea of submitting should be no problem to the wife. He does not say the woman's role is a submissive role to men in general. Paul is saying that in a home one must assume a leadership role and one a supportive role.

She cultivates Christian virtues. Proverbs 31 provides the following attributes of a good wife: She will do him good (vs. 12). She is industrious (vss. 13, 27). She is good provider of nutritious food (vss. 15, 16). She has authority (vs. 16). She enjoys a sense of accomplishment (vs. 18). She looks after clothing needs (vss. 19, 21). She is sensitive to the needs of the poor (vs. 20). She develops and has her own spiritual interest (vs. 24). She has inner strength and dignity (vs. 25). She is willing to express her own special insights; she is wise (vs. 26). She is a good mother (vs. 28).

¹¹⁹Pr 5:19.

¹²⁰Eph 5:22.

When God performed the first wedding in the Garden of Eden, He set forth the ideal. But God's divine ideal of marriage is not always followed. God created husbands and wives to live together and to stay together; to sustain, to encourage, and to resist temptation together. Unfortunately, because of sin, and due to some financial difficulties, reality may be different. Not every plan of providing nourishment for the family has a chance of success. Sometimes because of the lack of wisdom, at other times due to the misunderstanding of God's plan for their life or other reasons, people do make mistakes.

God does not abandon people when they make mistake, but is involved in the resolution of family problems. A genuine family is not without problems, but one where every member understand his or her responsibilities, and tries to help the others to survive, to increase happiness, and to develop a deep level of communication that is the basis of a good relationship

The principles given by God define family values. The Bible provides a thorough description of these principles for family values: (1) The principle of Love – The principle of love is the strongest link in a relationship between husband and wife, because love is the root of God's relationship with us. (2) The principle of Submission – Submit to one another doesn't mean that a woman to be a slave for her husband. (3) The principle of Unity – Man and woman must become one flesh. (4) The principle of Respect – More than exhibiting a good behavior toward his wife, Peter emphasizes the importance of the husband using his superior strength and experience in her behalf, and thus honoring her by becoming her protector and support.¹²¹

¹²¹ Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible* (Chicago, IL: World Bible Publishing, 1997), 1286.

Husband and wife are to be faithful to each other so long as life shall last, ever revealing the self-sacrifice that leads to the truest happiness and the highest perfection of character. The husband is to be the house band of the family, the priest of his home. The wife is to respect and love her husband, and he is to love and cherish his wife.¹²²

In Genesis 2:24 God gives us two components for a successful marriage: (1) man is to leave his father and mother, and (2) he is to cleave to his wife. His relationship with his wife must be the primary relationship in his life. “A total commitment and a total sharing of one person with the other must exist. As the couple share themselves intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, they become as one. This oneness that God intends is between husband and wife and excludes a third person.”

God wants marriage to be permanent, not ending in divorce. “What God has joined together, let man not separate” (Matt. 19: 6). It is clear that God’s intention is that when husband and wife unit in marriage, the oneness bound is not to be broken by any act of man. Commenting on the question asked by the Pharisees to Jesus on divorce, Matthew Henry said: “Some think, that, though the Law of Moses did permit divorce, yet in assigning the just causes for it, there was a controversy between the Pharisees among themselves, and they desired to know what Christ said to it. Matrimonial cases have been numerous, and sometimes intricate and perplexed; made so not by the law of God, but by the lusts and follies of men; and often in these cases people resolve, before they ask, what they will do.”¹²³

¹²²Ellen G. White, Manuscript Release, Vol. 18 (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen White Estate, 1993). 121.

¹²³Henry Matthew, Matthew Henry’s Commentary: On the Whole Bible (electronic ed. of the complete and unabridged edition, (1996, c 1991). (Mt. 19: 3) Peabody: Hendrickson

What does the Bible teach about divorce? The Bible makes it very clear: Divorce is not God's will. This same question continues to be asked by many individuals today. The Pharisees questioned Jesus about the divorce that Moses permitted. Again, Jesus' reply indicates that divorce is not God's plan: "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt. 19:8). God's original plan for marriage excluded divorce.

How did Jesus acknowledge both the divine plan for marriage and the reality confronting marriage in a fallen world? God has ordained the sanctity of marriage and provides ideals for the husband and wife. When man and woman fail to meet the ideal, divorce occurs. Guy Duty claims that the Hebrew word for divorce in the certificate of divorce signifies a cutting off. He adds that there are diversities for grounds of divorce. Jesus restated God's plan for marriage as a permanent union of a man and a woman. Christ's followers seek to uphold this plan, knowing that what he desires, he also enables by his grace and the indwelling of his spirit. Christians has a special obligation to approach marriage prayerfully, to choose their partners wisely, and to prepare carefully for the transition to marriage. Then, in marriage, they must sacredly guard their commitment to each other, seeking diligently for God's grace in the work of adjustment to each other and growing together.¹²⁴

"While marriage is divinely instituted, its subjects are fallen human beings. Marriages between Christian men and women do sometimes break down. Jesus acknowledged that hardness of human hearts led to the concession of divorce by Moses, through Jesus Himself was very explicit about how he viewed divorce." When a marriage is in crisis, those who are able to minister to them should do everything possible to help

¹²⁴Guy Duty, *Divorce and Remarriage* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1967), 39-40.

them experience reconciliation. As William F. Luck stated: “Divorce never should be taken lightly. Scripture provides guidance for restoring damaged relationship. When divorce has occurred, former partners should be encouraged to seek divine grace to help them examine their experience and to learn the will of God for their lives. God provides comfort to those who have been wounded. He also accepts the heartfelt repentance of individuals who commit the destructive sins, even those that carry with them irreparable consequences.”¹²⁵

The Bible describes a compassionate and forgiving God who throughout history has reached out to those who have fallen short of God’s ideal. Divorce not only destroys a marriage but also brings months or years of grief and hurt upon the entire family. Divorce can ruin lives and make people angry and bitter. It can lead to hating the spouse or hating oneself.

The responsibility of the church is to restore broken marriage relationships. We have a Christian responsibility to stand by our members’ side and bear their burdens with them. God’s method of restoring the person who has slipped and fallen is through the healing fellowship of the church. The mission of the church is to heal and restore. There should be continuous action to restore the member until he or she is again walking in the Spirit.

Marriage was the greatest pre-fall manifestation of his infinite love for humanity. It is a covenant of the heart rather than a social arrangement or civil contract. It is one of the primary goals to which we aspire as persons. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into

¹²⁵William F. Luck, *Divorce and Remarriage* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987).

intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities. Today successful marriages are being questioned critically by many people.

How are successful marriages created and maintained? Successful marriage becomes a union of personalities. Each one brings to the partnership qualities that enrich the life of the other as well as his own. Both experience some enhancement of personality, for they benefit, in some degree, from each other's attributes and capacities.¹²⁶ This union of personalities is achieved gradually through cooperation by people who are motivated to give of themselves and some of their individual freedom in exchange for the close affectional relationship marriage can provide.¹²⁷

People are concerned with the implications of successful marriage for stable social organization. Married couples are confronted with a series of life situations that require them to rise to challenges in their relationship, to change, to bend and to adjust.¹²⁸ Christian men and women must be co-laborers with the Holy Spirit as He leads them to heal, enrich and nurture lives. Only then will Christian lifestyles be an extension of Christ's ministry of reconciliation.

¹²⁶Judson T. Landis & Mary G. Landis, *Building A Successful Marriage*. (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 4.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHODOLOGY

The project is a structured program designed to educate and to train leaders in the practice of family life ministry in a manner that could engender spiritual growth and well-being of marriages within the general membership of Eden Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

The objective for implementing the project resulted from the fact that in the writer's observation, many of the married couples in the church are confronting difficulties in their marriage and failed to experience a deep and meaningful relationship with their partners.

The hypothesis of the study was based on the assumption that trainers within the faith community having participated in the project will have a deep understanding of God's plan for marriage and God's mission of reconciling all things unto God in Christ, and will become better equipped to instruct others in the practice of living in trustworthy expressions of God's self-giving love.

The first priority of the project was to educate participants concerning the possibilities leading to strengthen existing marital relationships in their daily lives and the second priority was to equip participants with the tools needed to instruct others in the practice of family life ministry. At the conclusion of the project, leaders will become

skilled family life trainers, capable of translating knowledge in the concept of marriage as a gift from God to humanity and promoting healing and reconciliation.

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Did the participants realize that the study is an enriching experience designed to enhance one of God's greatest gifts: marriage?
2. Did the study help the participants to understand the importance of a growing marriage relationship?
3. Was there a qualitative change in marriage commitment on the part of participants?

The purpose of the project was to identify married couple within the context of the faith community that confronted difficulties in their relationship and demonstrated seriousness about developing a lasting marriage relationship. Also, to develop a model serving as a template designed to instruct other members of the community. John Creswell suggest to "identify a single central phenomenon and to pose a tentative definition for it".¹

The design of the model employed in the field experience consisted of a selection process that is entirely voluntary and involved four married couples in difficulty in their marriage relationship of varying ages and different backgrounds. The size is large enough for effective dynamic participation but small enough for personal attention.

The research methodology employed in the study utilizes the action research method. It involves the examination and interpretation of observations for the purpose of discovering meanings and patterns of relationships. The method selected to use in this research study is the most appropriate to the questions being asked. The study attempted

¹John W. Creswell, *Research Design* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009), 125.

to develop skills and spiritual strength that will aid Christian living within the bonds of marriage. And since research is crucial to virtually every facet of our society, the network of social connections among researchers is a defining part of our social fabric.²

One week before conducting the study sessions, the researcher has presented a seminar which was entitled *Upholding Marriage*. The main goal of the seminar was to highlight the importance of death to self in keeping any marriage strong. It especially targeted improvement in the practice of family life in the homes of the members of Eden Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

The seminar was planned utilizing the information found in available Christian literature. Practical perspectives on the topic were also collected by the researcher who used his own interest and practice of family life ministry. A Pre-seminar Questionnaire has been prepared. This procedure expanded the researcher's views and perceptions on the topic as he was exposed to the needs and expectations of the participants in relation to better marriage relationships.

During the construction of the seminar, consideration was given to the presentation of the topic in a motivational way so that the concept of successful marriage relationships would be accepted. The seminar was also developed with the idea of assisting members to make their marriage relationship not only a blessing in their own lives, but also to help them share the spiritual benefits gained with others with whom they are closely associated. The participants were notified well in advance and invited to participate in this program designed for married couples.

²Wayne C. Booth, Gregory C. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, *Craft of Research* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 285.

The researcher intended that the seminar would be informative and especially very practical for the church members. He endeavored to use simple and clear language during the presentation and used home-made materials in his illustrations. In order to make the seminar presentation interesting and practical, the participants received a Pre-seminar Questionnaire to fill in before the presentation and a Post-seminar Questionnaire after the presentation. This method also encouraged involvement so they had notes ready for the discussion period.

During the presentation of the seminar, the researcher instructed the participant to note their queries or comments and save them for a debriefing period at the end. Then, they were invited to express their personal opinions regarding the topic. The purpose of this approach was to promote an orderly dialogue between the participants and the researcher, through the format of a question and answer period.

One of the strategies for making this seminar relevant to those who attended was to encourage good communication between the researcher and the participants. This methodology aimed to instill in the participants a strategy which they could emulate for the exchange of ideas in their own family circles, as they prepare and make change in their marriage relationship.

A pre-test and post-test questionnaire has been prepared and was administered at the beginning and conclusion of the study. Each participant was encouraged to provide feedback as to what was beneficial in the exercise and what could be done to bring greater clarity and understanding. Data obtained from each participant of the pre-test and post-test questionnaire are numerical responses to twelve questions developed by the researcher. They are compared with each other to verify whether or not there are any

quantitative changes in each participant's pre-test and post-test orientation. The percentage change for each question is also determined.

Table # 1 Pre-test and Post-test results for the entire population.

Table # 2 Pre-test and Post-test results per individual question.

Numerical changes to married couple responses occurring between the administration of the Pre-test and the Post-test. The following graph was employed to reflect the percentage change of each question by the entire population that occurred between the administration of the Pre-test and the Post-test.

Table # 3: Percentage change of Pre-test and Post-test data for the entire population.

| | Pre- Test | | Post- Test | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Total Number | | | | |
| Agree | | | | |
| Strongly Agree | | | | |

Project Timeline

The project lasted for six weeks with each session dedicated to a specific topic. Sessions will guide by points of reflection intended to shape discussion.

Week One

The First Session: The lecture for the first session centered on Christ the Center. During this session, information was provided showing that the cross of Christ removes the barriers that separate people from one another. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. Also the first session involved a presentation on the theological and biblical foundation for family unity. It highlighted the importance of this spiritual activity from a theological perspective as it relates to the development of faith, especially for Christians. It cited examples of Bible characters as they ordered and gathered their household members around their family altar and conducted combined worship of God. It also presented the reasons why God's children ought to worship God. Through this section the researcher established the *Why* of Christ the Center.

Points of Reflection:

- 1) The Bible exalts Christ as the great center who draws all disconnected relationships together in His body on the cross.
- 2) How has Christ made one out of two?
- 3) What practical changes does Christ bring to your life that enable you to experience the oneness and unity you have been promised?
- 4) How close is your family to the center of that circle?
- 5) What else must come down in order for the relationships to be as they ought to be?
- 6) What specific ways can you rebuild the altar in your home, if indeed it needs some rebuilding?

Week Two

The Second Session: The lecture for the second session centered on Communication. During this session information was provided pertaining to the importance of open communication for a healthy and fulfilling marriage life. A positive communication is a sine qua non condition for unity and happiness. It helped to understand the quality of changing the information, ideas and feeling. Both partners must be able to share important emotions and beliefs with each other. The objective was to help couples send clear, direct messages without blaming or accusing.

Points of Reflection:

- 1) Does each partner feel heard by the other?
- 2) Do they feel comfortable sharing feelings with each other?
- 3) Does each partner understand the feelings and reasons for these feelings that the other states?

Week Three

The Third Session: The lecture for the third session centered on Role Relationship in the Christian Marriage. During this session information was provided on how Heaven recognizes all as of equal value. When there was oneness, there was no need of defining whether the husband or the wife was head. Mutuality in self-giving was, and still is a revolutionary Christian teaching about social relationships. It brings to life the spiritual reality that all are one in Christ; there are no exceptions. The proving ground of

Christian submission is in the home. If this principle is effective in the home, it will make a dramatic difference in the church.

Points Of Reflection:

- 1) How does God define the roles of the marriage partners?
- 2) How are roles in the Christian marriage different from the roles in other marriage?
- 3) What is implied in being the head?
- 4) What motivates you to submit in humility and service in relationships?
- 5) Do you have a mutually agreed-upon understanding of your marital roles, whether companionship or traditional?

Week Four

The Fourth Session: The lecture for the fourth session centered on forgiveness. At the heart of Christianity is an incredibly wonderful concept—forgiveness. It is God’s gift to husbands and wives when hearts and relationships have been wounded. Through the cross of Christ, forgiveness is offered, even before the offender asks for it. By God’s grace, God made a fountain that has washed us and invites us to come, repent, and be clean. Humanly, forgiveness is a decision to let go of the destructive malice of revenge. In our human nature we do not have propensities to love, to forgive, to forget. These qualities can be developed only if the foundation of our relationship with people around us is nourished from above. Participants were encouraged to understand that couples are not perfect, therefore they can make mistakes; hence the necessity to forgive each other. Forgiveness is a gift given to self, which releases an injured person from anger and resentment.

Points of Reflection:

- 1) Since no one is perfect, is there always a need to forgive?
- 2) If you forgive your spouse, is your spouse much more likely to forgive you?
- 3) Forgiveness is no substitute for changed behavior, but is it always the first step toward changed behavior?
- 4) In what way does the assurance that you have been forgiven by God in Christ give you courage to offer forgiveness to a wrong doer or to make a much-needed apology?

Week Five

The Fifth Session: The lecture for the fifth session centered on the issue of marriage commitment. During this session information was provided on the assumption that no marriage is so good or so bad that it cannot benefit from an enrichment experience. A truly genuine relationship requires commitment. This is the decision to care. It is the result of a promise made and kept. The partners love unconditionally. It is this love that is the bonding agent in marriage; it holds in joys and sorrows. Participants were reminded that marriage is not always romantic. Every couple deserves some time to themselves to renew their commitment, set new goals, and rekindle their flame of love. Many partners soon forget about their pledges made in front of God and many other people. The sense of commitment loses some of its value, and without new energies and new infusion of love and faithfulness, life gets bored and monotonous. Participants were reminded to spend time nurturing and fostering this growth of intimacy.

Points of Reflection:

- 1) Do you think without commitment the marriage cannot last?
- 2) Do you know that not only should the wedding certificate be the link that keeps together spouses, but also the sense of commitment, the promise to be faithful to the partner until death?
- 3) What practical steps can you take to change and be more open to responsibility for what you do?
- 4) Why is it important to address the heart as well as the head in understanding relationships?

Week Six

The Sixth Session: The lecture for session six centered on restoration. Though the institution of marriage was distorted by sin, the gospel can restore marriage to its original purity and beauty. During this session information was provided on how marriage was divinely instituted by God as a permanent, monogamous union of a man and a woman. It was meant to be a blessing, another aspect of God's great work of creation. Marriage was, perhaps, the greatest pre-fall manifestation of God's infinite love for humanity. How tragic, then, the openness, equality, and mutuality of the first human pair were supplanted by the curse brought on by their sin. The race has been living with those dire consequences ever since. Participants were reminded that with Christ, a new day dawned for the institution of marriage, as well as for the marital experience of couples. In Christ, husband and wife may know a restoration of God's plan for marriage.

Points of Reflection:

1. What changes can you make in order to allow more fully the principles of the gospel to control your marriage?
2. In what ways do you see in your own life the tendency to shift blame for your actions on others?
3. Why is death to self so important in keeping any marriage strong?
4. When your marriage is in crisis, who ministers to you and helps you to experience reconciliation?

The setting for the study was a suburb church located in the cozy city of New Rochelle, New York, with a membership of 240 parishioners. The conceptual model that formed the basis of research, data collection and analysis is rooted in three components:

- a) Historical Foundations
- b) Biblical Foundations
- c) Theological Foundations

The most immediate concern for the researcher in counseling to the participants is an understanding of the biblical perspective of marriage. When the theological foundations of marriage are accurately articulated in their proper perspective, the nature of marriage is more clearly understood, and the chances of building a strong Christian marriage significantly increase.

Repeated observations have led me to the conclusion that many of the married couples in this church are confronting difficulties in their marriage and failed to experience a deep and meaningful relationship with their partners. I decided to implement this project by approaching several married couples and discuss the rationale for training a core group that will increase the well-being of marriages.

The personal demographics of the participants of the study will reflect a small percentage of the general church membership. The gender composition of the participants was represented by four couples, 4 males and 4 females. Their age groups were as follows: 1 couple with the age of 28 years; 2 couples aged between 33 and 37 years; two other couples aged 40 and 46 years; and one couple aged between 49 and 53 years. Each participant signed a confidential statement indicating that they would refrain from divulging events that discussed during study sessions.

The researcher used multiple sources of data: information gleaned from journal entries, discussion sessions, readings and personal observation. Before starting the sessions, a Pre-test was administered to the 8 participants of the project. The Pre-test was attempted to examine the knowledge of each couple on the issue of building better marriage relationship.

The researcher chose to employ the Likert scale to apply a numerical rating to the responses of the model. The Pre-test was applied to the post-test to see if there is a qualitative change in the knowledge and the practice of this discipline.

At the conclusion of the project the researcher examined Pre-test and Pro-test results, discussion sessions, reading and personal observation, to see whether or not the project was an effective vehicle in educating a core group to strengthen marriages, to enhance spiritual unity, to nurture continuing romance in the marriage and to develop lasting marriage skills that enriched the quality of the marriage relationship.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The project designed by the researcher to train leaders in the practice of building better marriage relationship was conducted at Eden Seventh-Day Adventist Church, New Rochelle, New York. The objectives of the study were to reinforce in couples the idea that marriage is to be viewed as a lifelong; that marriage plays a profound role in our lives; that a good marital relationship is worth seeking; and that stability, loyalty, solidarity, and feelings of belonging and of sharing are all part of being married.

Before starting the first session, participants were welcomed, prayer was offered, and a hymn was sung. An overview of the objectives was given: to help couples see themselves just as they are and where they should be in their relationship. Participants were asked to be punctual for subsequent sessions and were informed of the importance of attending all sessions since evaluation of the sessions could only be valid if all the sessions were attended. The participants were informed that questions would be entertained at any time. The sensitivity of the subjects for discussion was emphasized

At the beginning, a Pre-test Questionnaire was administered to each of the participants to make sure they understood the topic. At the end, the same questionnaire was administered as a Post-test. The researcher was satisfied with the responses received. The results of the Post-test showed that each participant scored more than 92% of the questions than they did on the pre-test. According to the opinion of the researcher, progress was made. Each participant understood that marital difficulties must be viewed

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|------|---|-----|
| Agree | 5 | 62.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 3 | 37.5 | 8 | 100 |

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the population strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 62.5% of the population that initially agreed and 37.5% that initially strongly agreed at the administration of the Pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 37.5% increase on the part of participants that initially agreed that marriage is a divine institution and it is for the happiness of men and women and a 62.5% of those who initially strongly agreed. Pre-test results showed a big number of participants not strongly agreeing with the statement that marriage is for the happiness of men and women. After participating in the lecture and discussion sessions, all participants agreed that with marriage, God supplied a very special kind of companionship. God intended husbands and wives to experience a unique union and to be happy.

Table # 4: Response to the Statement: The Cross of Christ removes the barriers that separate people from one another. Performance of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Participants | | | | |
| Strongly | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|----|---|-----|
| Disagree | | | | |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 2 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 6 | 75 | 8 | 100 |

At the end of the study, 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 25% that initially agreed and 75% that initially strongly agreed at the administration of the Pre-test. Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 75% increase on the part of the participants that initially agreed that the cross of Christ removes the barriers that separate people from one another. After participating in the lecture and discussion sessions, all participants agreed that the cross of Christ is good news that helps couples to truly know one flesh unity in marriage. By faith in Christ, long-divided families can be reconciled.

Table # 5: Response to the Statement: A positive communication is a condition for unity and happiness. Performance of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|--|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------|---|-----|
| Total | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Participants | | | | |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 1 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 1 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 2 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 50 | 8 | 100 |

At the conclusion of the study, 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 12.5% that initially disagree, to 12.5% that were initially uncertain, and 25% that initially agree and to 50% that initially strongly agreed with the administration of the Pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 50% increase on the part of the participants that initially agreed that a positive communication is a condition for unity and happiness. After participating in the lecture and discussion sessions, all participants agreed that instead of yelling at your husband or your wife, you should look for opportunities to teach him or her how to communication.

Table # 6: Response to the Statement: When there is oneness, there is no need of defining whether the husband or the wife is head.

Performance of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|-----------------------|----------|------|-----------|-----|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Participants | | | | |
| Strongly | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | | | | |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 1 | 12.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 3 | 37.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 50 | 8 | 100 |

At the end of the study, 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared to 12.5% that were initially uncertain, 37.5% that initially agreed and 50% that initially strongly agreed with the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 50% increase on the part of the participants that initially agreed that when there is oneness, there is no need of defining whether the husband or the wife is head. After participating in the lecture and discussion sessions, all participants agreed with the statement.

Table # 7: Response to the Statement: The proving ground of Christian submission is in the home.
Performance of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Participants | | | | |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 2 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 2 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 2 | 25 | 4 | 50 |
| Strongly Agree | 2 | 25 | 4 | 50 |

At the conclusion of the study 50% of the participants agreed with the statement that the proving ground of Christian submission is in the home and 50% strongly agreed, compared with 25% who agreed and 25% who disagreed at the administration of the Pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 25% increase on the part of the participants that initially agreed and strongly agreed. After participating in the lecture and discussion sessions, participants agreed that mutuality in self-giving still is a revolutionary Christian

teaching about social relationships. It brings to life the spiritual reality that all are in Christ. It is important to place oneself humbly before another person on the basis of voluntary choice.

**Table # 8: Response to the Statement: “Forgiveness is God’s gift to husbands and wives when hearts and relationships have been wounded”.
Performance Of Total Population**

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total Participants | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 6 | 75 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 2 | 25 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0 | 8 | 100 |

At the end of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 75% of the participants that was initially uncertain and 25% that initially agreed at the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 25% increase on the part of the participants that was initially uncertain as Forgiveness is God's gift to husbands and wives when hearts and relationships have been wounded and an 75% increase on the part of those who agreed with the statement. After having participated in the lecture sessions and discussion group, participants admitted that at the heart of Christianity is an incredibly wonderful concept—forgiveness. Through the cross of Christ, forgiveness is offered, even before the offenders ask for it. If forgiveness is ultimately to be effective, there must be repentance on the part of the wrong doer.

Table # 9: Response to the Statement: A truly genuine relationship requires commitment.
Performance of The Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total Participants | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 4 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 4 | 50 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|-----|
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0 | 8 | 100 |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|-----|

At the end of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 50% that initially agreed and 50% that initially agreed and 50% that initially were uncertain at the administration of the Pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 50% increase on the part of the participants that were initially uncertain as to a truly genuine relationship requires commitment.

At the time of the Pre-test was administered, 50% of the participants were unsure about the statement. But after having participated in the lecture and discussion groups, participants agreed that when we commit ourselves to another person, as in marriage, there must be a willing surrender of ourselves in order to make a different choice in the future, a surrender of control over an important segment of our lives.

Table # 10: Response to the Statement: Without commitment the marriage cannot last.
Performance of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total Participants | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Strongly Disagree | 8 | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|-----|
| Uncertain | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0 | 8 | 100 |

At the end of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 100% that initially disagree with the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 100% increase on the part of the participants as they agreed that without commitment the marriage cannot last. When the Pre-test was administered, 100% of the participants were unsure about the statement. After the lecture and discussion groups, all participants realized that the principle of commitment to family maybe the strongest pillar of the home. The sense of commitment should be the link that keeps spouses together with the promise to be faithful to the partner until death.

Table # 11: Response to the Statement: The gospel can restore marriage to its original purity and beauty. Performance Of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|---------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Participants | | | | |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|------|---|-----|
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 3 | 37.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 5 | 62.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 0 | 0 | 8 | 100 |

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 37.5% of the participants that initially were uncertain, and 62.5% that initially agreed with the administration of the Pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 37.5% increase on the part of the participants that initially agreed with the statement and a 62.5% increase on the part of those individuals that initially were uncertain. After having participated in the lecture and discussion session, participants arrived at the understanding that the gospel can restore marriage to its original purity and beauty.

Table # 12: Response to the Statement: In Christ, husband and wife may know a restoration of God's plan for marriage. Performance Of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|--------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Participants | | | | |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 4 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 50 | 8 | 100 |

At the conclusion of the study, 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 50% that initially agreed and 50% that strongly agreed with the administration of the pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 50% increase on the part of the participants that initially agreed with the statement *In Christ, husband and wife may know a restoration of God's plan for marriage*. After the lecture and discussion groups,

participants were able to understand that though sin had damaged marriage, God through Christ is working in us to restore what we have lost.

Table # 13: Response to the statement: No marriage is so good or so bad that it can't benefit from an enrichment experience. Performance Of Total Population

| | PRE-TEST | | POST-TEST | |
|---------------------------|----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | NO. | % | NO. | % |
| Total Participants | 8 | 100 | 8 | 100 |
| Strongly Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Disagree | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Uncertain | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Agree | 4 | 50 | 0 | 0 |
| Strongly Agree | 4 | 50 | 8 | 100 |

At the conclusion of the study 100% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 100% of participants that were uncertain with the administration of the Pre-test.

Pre-test and Post-test results reflect a 100% increase on the part of the participants since everyone was uncertain about the statement: *No marriage is so good or so bad that*

it can't benefit from an enrichment experience. After the lecture and discussion groups, all participants agreed that any marriage can benefit from an enrichment experience.

Journal Entries

What was the opinion of the participants in the study? The objective of the six weeks session was to help couples to see themselves as they are in their relationships and to make progress in understanding marital covenant love. The eight participants submitted journal entries to the study which had their points of view.

According to the testimonials collected, progress was made. Here is what participant identified as ID # 01: confessed to me: “Before attending the sessions I used to ignore my marital problems. I used to practice denial. But now I don’t do that anymore. I really want my husband to be happy.

Participant identified as ID# 02 was in agreement with other members. He said to me: “Pastor, in your lectures you were describing the relationship that exists right now between my wife and me. If our problems are too big for you, please refer us to someone who can help us”. He added: “I have never said this to anyone before”.

Participant identified as ID# 03 was very pleased with the presentations and agreed on the relevancy of the material presented and that its contents were helpful.

Participant identified as ID# 04 told her story: “My husband thought I had an easy life. He couldn’t understand what the fuss was about. I could not make him see that the big house, the nice car, the beautiful furniture, even the beautiful son could not fill the void in my heart. I wanted to be with him more often. I wanted him to touch me, to caress me and to tell me that he understood my loneliness and he would see to it that after work

he would come home instead of spending half of the evening with friends. When my parents called, I would say that everything was just perfect. A marriage cannot function without intimacy.

Participant identified as ID# 05 is of the opinion that marriage is a lifelong union, a holy covenant. God intends marriage to be permanent. God's will for every spouse is emotional, physical, and financial security.

Participant identified as ID# 06 concurs with points discussed during the six-week study leading to the conclusion that commitment is one of the factors that causes the marriage to endure. It is an aspect of permanence.

Participant identified as ID# 7 pointed out that communication skills are important in a good relationship. True intimacy cannot exist without effective communication.

Participant identified as ID# 8 states that learning to solve problems is a sign of growth. The way one handles marital conflict shows what type of person one really is. Trying to help couples achieve intimacy while there are major unresolved conflicts is unlikely to be effective.

The researcher found the participants journal entries to be very interesting and very insightful. Married couples have the responsibility to care for each other. Therefore, Christian couples should have good understanding and love. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband". (1Cor. 7:3).¹

¹ 1 Cor 7:3.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

More than ever before, the quality of marital life is in decline. Actually, every aspect of our lives is in some way influenced by negative factors such as inflation, invasion of immorality by mass-media, violence, and other issues. Without a spiritual element present in the life of an individual to provide hope and optimism, life seems worthless. God is looking for kingdom men and women. In his book, *Passion for Your Kingdom Purpose*, Sir Walter Mack Jr., writes: “Kingdom men have the God-given authority to define things and to call things into being”.¹

It is becoming clear that the marital love relationship will have permanence only to the degree to which it satisfies the emotional, psychological, intellectual, spiritual, and physical needs of the partners. There is a hunger for intimacy in every marital relationship. Married couples must invest time and energy in the relationship if it is to grow. Good communication is the lifeline of successful intimacy, and is invariably the result of hard work of committed partners working in pairs.

Our marriage to God is a covenant based on reconciliation. Reconciliation is precisely what is needed to soothe the hurts of marital intimacy. We can give to our

¹Sir Walter Mack Jr., *Passion of your Kingdom Purpose* (Tulsa, OK: Harrison House, 2004), 132.

human marriage the forgiveness we have received from God. What will keep us going during darker days is the belief that God is for our marriage.

Contribution to Ministry

This research has had a positive impact on the writer and his ministry and has made the following contributions:

- 1) It challenged the writer to be more supportive of marriage itself by taking seriously the responsibility for ongoing enrichment for the already married. This calls for strong post-wedding emphasis.
- 2) One of the tremendous lessons learned from the participants is that they are patient with the church in ways that many of us are not. This lesson has helped the writer to develop more patience with the members of his congregation, especially for those who seem to be non-committed and non-involved.
- 3) In the writer's dealings with the participants, he recognized a certain defensiveness on their part. This research has helped him to understand that rather than criticizing the participants for being defensive or being less accepting, he should move beyond their defense to try to understand their feelings.
- 4) Conducting the sessions in the writer's own church provided the opportunity to learn the chemistry of the church on a specific issue. With this knowledge he was able to develop a ministry geared toward meeting individual and specific needs as well as the collective and general needs.
- 5) The writer's church has already taken steps to correct the negative impression the divorce and separated members had of them. A visitation program has been developed which is targeted not only toward divorced and separated members who have been irregular attendees, but toward other delinquent members as well.

- 6) A social committee was formed to provide recreational activities for the church in general with a desire to reach those who might be experiencing loneliness and rejection.
- 7) Plans have already been put in progress to develop a support group; there are also plans to utilize the professional help available within and outside the church for seminars and workshops on other relevant issues.
- 8) Dates have been set to conduct a class with a specific intent to provide group activities for single persons and troubled couples.
- 9) As a result of the writer's interest in this study, two churches invited the writer to conduct seminars on (1) marriage; (2) singleness; (3) and divorce and separation.
- 10) Above all, this study has helped the writer as a minister to understand that the redemptive act of God in Christ is the good news that no person need be excluded from—a relationship with the savior. No matter what offense has been committed, no matter how far one has drifted from God's love, there is always forgiveness and grace if genuine repentance is sought.

Conclusion

The six-week study designed to train a core group in building better marriage relationships was a successful endeavor that has implications for the church-at-large. This project was an attempt to find a response to the hindrances that undermine the marital relationship. The project had but one purpose: to help married couples to change for the better. For the sake of clarity, let me list the main conclusions:

- 1) Marriage is a divine institution and it is for the happiness of men and women.
- 2) Marriage is a close, lifelong companionship; it is indissoluble, unbreakable.
- 3) Love and intimacy are indispensable ingredients of a good marriage.

- 4) Couples are human; therefore they can make mistakes in marriage. Hence the necessity of mutual forgiveness and acceptance.
- 5) In order for us to grow up on marriage, love must be unconditional and self-sacrificing.
- 6) We must learn techniques that can help us become better husbands and wives. But such techniques must be undergirded by the power of God.
- 7) A successful Christian family is the most convincing manifestation of the Christian marriage.
- 8) Marriage is from God, all is not lost in an estrange relationship. There is something on which one can rekindle a dead relationship.

Participants of the study intimated that they experienced a broadening knowledge of a love relationship. Each indicated that they were better equipped to help the church and the community. The model is relevant to the urban congregation.

Recommendations

The six-week project proved to be a success in obtaining the desired objective. It was designed to reach out to Christian and non-Christian couples. Healing, forgiveness, reconciliation, and acceptance must be seen as part of the mission of the church to reach out to those who are hurting. The local church should be seen as a healing and caring community. The pastor should intervene and bring healing to many hurting and dysfunctional marriages.

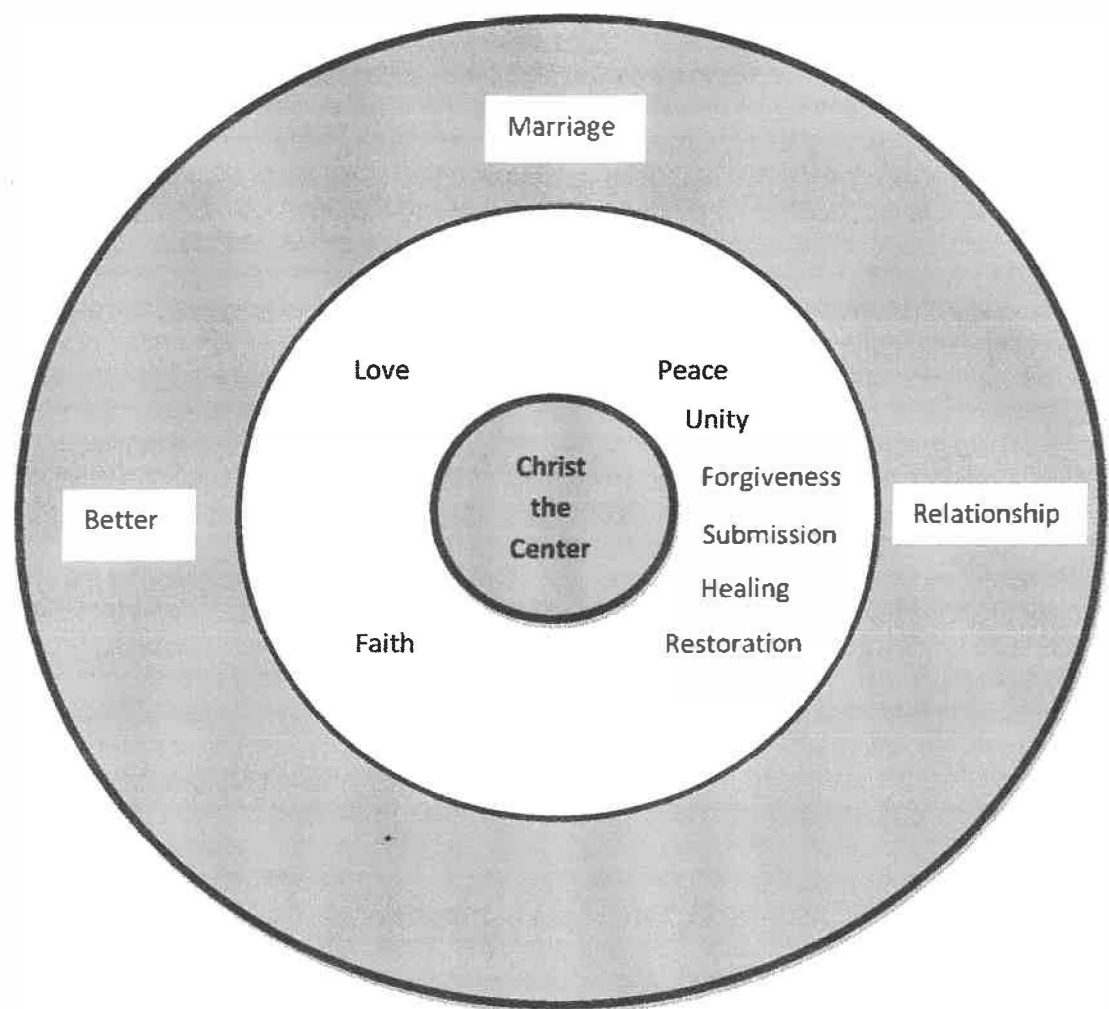
The study has implications in two main areas: practice and future research. The research hold implications for pastors, married couples, church members, divorced and separated persons. These recommendations are:

- 1) A replication of the study could be done using other churches. It would be helpful to compare the findings of these studies to determine if they are generalized.
- 2) A correlation study could be conducted on the needs and concern of married couples. Such a study could be helpful to both pastors and church member.
- 3) A comparative study could be done on the marriage rate within Eden SDA Church, comparing churches that emphasis strong marriage and the original intention of God for the family with churches that have little or no emphasis on strong marriages and the original intention of God for the family.
- 4) Pastors should seek to conduct a need assessment geared toward the married, divorced and separated couples, and then construct a program to meet those identified needs. It is assumed that from this assessment, important needs will emerge, such as: (1) the need for a support group system; (2) the need for seminars; (3) the need for more sermons on the family, marriage, divorce, and separation; (4) the need for dysfunctional couples, divorced and separated persons to be visited and prayed with.
- 5) Pastors should set up within their congregations a biblical platform on which members can stand. The sessions revealed that many have chosen to ignore the controversial subject of divorce and separation.
- 6) Pastors should play the leading role in directing the process of leading the church toward a new sense of love, compassion, understanding, forgiveness, and acceptance.
- 7) This study should promote insights and awareness for married couples about the issues involved in the research at Eden SDA Church.
- 8) For married couples, it would be helpful to understand the pain and isolation, the feelings of rejection, loneliness, grief, depression, and guilt that come with divorce and separation and, therefore, try to maintain the marriage relationship by the grace of God and the power of His Holy Spirit.

- 9) Establish strategic networks to address the issue.
- 10) Establish educational and training programs on marriage and family life.
- 11) Identify married couples with immediate needs.
- 12) The church should have a contract with a family counselor or an official advisor in order to provide information and to counsel people.
- 13) Build the networking capacity of the church and the community through collaboration with other agencies.
- 14) Create a support group for couples confronted with dysfunctional marriages and separation.
- 15) Organize training sessions, 4 times a year that will deal with identified needs in the church and the faith community. A family counselor specialized in marriage should be invited to speak and to answer to questions.
- 16) Create a committee that will work to identify all the factors that contribute to tension in the family which leads to family crises culminating in separation and divorce.
- 17) Seek healing and employ problem-solving strategies to strengthen the family undergoing temporary separation.
- 18) Develop a database for assessing, implementing and coordinating activities that teach and support families in obtaining necessary family life skills.

APPENDIX A
MODEL OF PROJECT

**Jean F. Monestime's Model of Better
Marriage Relationships**



APPENDIX B

PRE-TEST AND POST-TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-Seminar Questionnaire

(Confidential)

Name of Church:

Age:

How long have you been married? :

Sex:

Read each statement and then circle the appropriate point that most closely describes your feelings.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

1. What I really want is a change in my partner's behavior. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I still love my partner though I don't appreciate his/her attitude. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I listen to my partner's ideas, even if I don't agree. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I paraphrase or restate what my partner has said if it is not clear to me 1 2 3 4 5
5. I really do my best to understand my partner. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I change my mind when the evidence indicates that I should do so. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I cannot experience marital satisfaction without changes in my partner's behavior. 1 2 3 4 5
8. My influence is based on persuasion, reason and truth rather than emotion and coercion. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I find it difficult to let my partner know something he/she does and says. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I need to listen to my partner as he/she needs to listen to me. 1 2 3 4 5

Post-Seminar Questionnaire

Name of Church:

How long have you been married?

Age:

How long have you been a church member?

Sex:

Read each statement and then circle the appropriate answer that most closely describes your feelings.

1. Strongly Disagree
2. Disagree
3. Uncertain
4. Agree
5. Strongly Agree

1. This presentation on Upholding Marriage helps me understand my responsibility toward my partner. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I feel that God intends marriage to permanent. 1 2 3 4 5
3. Intimacy and love are necessary ingredients of a durable marriage. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I feel that I get out of marriage what I put into it. 1 2 3 4 5
5. One's spouse must know that he or she is the most important person to the other person. 1 2 3 4 5
6. Without commitment the marriage cannot last. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Since no one is perfect, there is always a need to forgive. 1 2 3 4 5
8. If we forgive our spouse, our spouse is much more likely to forgive us. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I am satisfied of my marriage now. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Communication skills are important in marital satisfaction. 1 2 3 4 5

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